



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600078816-



SPOKEN IN ANGER.

SPOKEN IN ANGER.

A Nobel.

"Aye, they ruled him, those fierce passions."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1877.

[Right of Translation reserved by the Author.]

251. d. 489.

LONDON:
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.



SPOKEN IN ANGER.

CHAPTER I.



LOWDEN did not stay long at Doolington Hall—about three weeks—and then he and Marion left for Seaton-glyn. They spent the winter there, and the summer on the Continent, so more than a year passed before Lucy saw them again. When they returned to England, Marion wrote, inviting Lucy and Vivien to stay with them in London. It was to please little D'Arcy that she wished Vivien to come; the child had longed strangely for his friend.

Lucy stood with the open letter in her hand. Would it be wise to go? she thought; and her heart reminded her that when he last stayed at the Hall Clowden's manner had been perfectly polite—nothing more; and she had felt a sweet sense of peace. He had forgotten the past, and she might love him without shame, for he would never know it. So she reasoned, so she lulled her heart, and it seemed a bright vista of happiness—the thought of seeing him daily, hearing him speak, and hiding the secret of her love from all eyes. So when Carrie asked her if she had decided on going, it was a very bright face Lucy raised as she said “yes.”

What a tiny thread our fate often hangs on. Could Lucy have looked into the future, that happily spoken “yes” would have been a shuddering negative.

Marion did all in her power to make Lucy as happy as possible during her stay in London, and she was happy. How could she have been otherwise in the constant presence of the man she loved so wholly and perfectly? He was courteous and friendly to her, and Lucy's heart hid its love in happy purity. There was a halo round those days that she looked back to in the after-time, remembering their quiet, perfect happiness with pitiful yearning. So it lived its short day, this calm sweet lull, and then the storm burst.

One evening Lucy sat alone in the drawing-room; Lord Clowden and Marion had gone to a Court ball. She had clasped the glittering family gems on Marion's full throat and firm white arms, receiving a fond kiss for her loving service; she had watched her go, in all the pride of her

beauty, all the splendour of her perfect toilet; and now Lucy felt weary, so she threw herself into a low arm-chair, resting her bright head on its blue velvet cushion, and slowly weaving her thoughts into a dream, fell fast asleep; an unconsciously pretty picture in her white muslin gown, her only adornment a deep red rose half drooping from her loosened golden hair, her full lips parted, and the soft flush of sleep on her fair face.

She had not wished Clowden to know that she still wore his ring, so she turned it round, and put another over it. She could not take it off, it was such a link of the past, such a memento of that time when her love had been so full of happy hope. But now, as she lay sleeping, the little ring was turned round to its proper place, and the jewelled hearts blazed out fitfully.

Lucy must have slept for hours, for when at last she opened her eyes the room was full of bright summer sunlight ; for a moment she was dimly conscious that some one was watching her, and with a thoroughly awakened start saw Lord Clowden standing in the window, still in full evening dress, looking jaded and haggard in the fresh morning. Lucy rose up with a little nervous laugh.

“How very stupid of me,” she said ; “I must have gone to sleep.”

“I am very sorry you moved, Miss Dashwood,” he said ; “I assure you, I have not seen a prettier picture this year. Sleeping beauty, or something of the sort, you know.” Then he added, coming up to her, and holding out his hand, “I suppose we ought to say good morning?”

The pretty dimples came and went on

Lucy's fresh flushing face as she gave him her soft little hand ; she had not seen Clowden alone since that day when he flung her from him in anger six years ago ; she felt a strange thrill of painful happiness, standing talking to him, unfettered by the restraint of a third person.

"At least," she said, "we have the advantage of being the early birds this morning."

"The early birds, who caught the traditional worm ? But I remember hearing it once remarked, that if the worm had not been up so early it would not have been caught ; so there are two sides to that proverb."

"Perhaps the worm was out late," she laughed.

"Improving the moral with a dissipated worm, Miss Lucy?" And he watched

the bright flash of repartee dancing in the sunny depth of her eyes.

There was a large bay window at the side of the room, leading down by a flight of stone steps to a small garden below; Clowden unfastened it, letting in the pure scented air. Some beautiful roses were growing in the balcony; he carefully picked one, saying—

“That flower in your hair is withered, Miss Dashwood; will you put this in instead?”

It was a strange request, and some strange impulse, born of nervousness perhaps, made Lucy grant it; she turned to a glass near and carefully arranged it. There was no coquetry in the action; she was scarcely conscious of the care her trembling fingers took to fasten it; she felt the fire of Clowden’s eyes, and lingered

at the glass, hardly daring to turn and meet them. He took two quick steps to her side.

"I am glad to see you have kept your promise," he half whispered, taking her left hand, and looking at the two little hearts. "Have you thought of me a little all these years, Lucy?"

Lucy raised her eyes, one quick azure, brightening flash, and he was answered. For her very soul she could not have helped that look ; the Recording Angel must have sorrowed to impute it to her as sin, her heart was so wholly unconscious of wrong.

He bent down impulsively and put his arm round her ; she struggled for a moment, startled at the wild passion in his face, and then lay still in his arms, feeling frightened and helpless, his hot lips burning hers in the mad intensity of that long kiss.

He let her go; she staggered from his arms, her face flushed with indignant shame;—but too late! There, in the doorway, like a carved Nemesis, stood Marion Strafford; her cheeks dyed the deepest crimson, her eyes glittering like gems, all the ruddy billows of her hair falling over her white neck and the pale-blue quilted facing of her dressing-gown.

“Go!” she said, turning to Lucy, stretching out her arm and pointing to the door.

The girl shrank, pale and trembling, from the withering scorn of those blazing, angry eyes. She tottered from the room, mechanically closing the door behind her; and they stood alone, facing each other, this husband and wife! He with his head bowed by a heavy weight of shame; she sternly erect, the warm colour fading to a ghastly pallor.

“How often have you and Miss Dashwood held morning meetings in this room?” she said, pressing her hand on the back of a chair by her side, so heavily that the blue veins stood out from the delicate flesh like whipcords.

“Never before ; on my honour I swear it !” he cried, raising his head, his manhood returning as he rendered this tardy justice to the woman who loved him.

“Your honour !” she said, laughing low in mockery. “Really, Lord Clowden, you are very amusing ; I did not give you credit for such dramatic talent. I assure you it was quite by chance I witnessed that pretty *tableau*—quite by chance !” Her voice shook, and she covered her face in a sudden burst of hysterical weeping.

It was, as she said, quite by chance that she had seen them together. One of the

housemaids, whose duty it was to dust the drawing-room, had seen Lucy asleep there, and, meeting Lady Clowden's maid on the stairs, told her of it; the Abigail straightway repeated it to Marion while disrobing her, and she had laughingly thrown on her dressing gown, meaning to startle Lucy. She had opened the door softly, with a bright merry smile on her face, and the sight that met her eyes had frozen her heart's blood with sudden jealous agony.

Clowden stood looking at her : there was something startling in this sudden outburst of passion in the hitherto perfectly calm woman. This was their first quarrel, and he wished himself well out of it.

"Marion," he said, meekly, "forgive me;" and he tried to take her hand.

But she tore it from him. "Go!" she said, raising her tear-stained face,

"go! I will never speak to you again. Go!"

"Do you mean it?" he said, in a voice of suppressed passion, and his face was very pale.

"Yes," she cried, stamping her little slippered foot. "Go! go! go! I hate the sight of you."

He stood before her, a dark scowl on his brow, all the fierce passion of his race burning with a dull, ominous fire in his eyes.

"By the God in heaven, Marion!" he cried, striking a carved table that stood near with such force that the frail wood-work fell crushed and broken beneath the weight of his clenched hand, "if you drive me from you, you shall repent it." And with a heavy impatient step he passed through the open window, and stood in the

balcony, the fresh morning air coming like sweet balm on his heated brow.

The two children, Vivien and D'Arcy, were picking flowers in the little garden ; they always brought a small posy for Marion's breakfast-plate, and their glad young voices came up to him, but he never heeded them ; he stood motionless and unconscious of all around him, his brows knit in passionate thought. He did not notice little D'Arcy with infinite difficulty climb the broad stone steps, one by one ; and when the little soft hand clung to his with a lisped " Good morn—ing, pa—pa," he shook him impatiently from him.

The little figure swayed for a moment, and then losing its balance, rolled down the hard stone steps, and lay still and motionless on the gravel below. There was a

startled cry from Vivien, and another yet more piercing shriek, as Marion dashed past Clowden.

“He is dead—you have killed my child!” she moaned, as she bent over the little prostrate figure.





CHAPTER II.



UT little D'Arcy was not dead ;
when they moved him the
blue-veined eyelids quivered,
and he moaned low and
piteously. Clowden stood out on the
balcony, like one stupefied, long after they
had taken the child in. Indistinct, vague
thoughts floated through his brain ; he
could scarcely realise the horror of the last
hour. All seemed so peaceful as he stood
there, that he could almost fancy the
memory of some fearful dream haunted
him. It was all so momentary ; the little
hand had clung to his, and he had flung
it off—that was all ; and yet if that child

died he would be a murderer. He realised it all now—a *murderer*!

He could bear it no longer. He entered the room, and opened the door; the whole large house was strangely silent. He went up the broad stairs slowly, as one who half fears, and yet would rather have those fears confirmed than bear the sickening weight of suspense. He paused in the ante-room that led to the nursery. The door was open, and he could see in plainly from where he stood. To his dying day he never forgot that scene. It seemed stamped on his brain more like the memory of a painted picture than a living *tableau*. At the bedside Marion sat, still with her ruddy hair tangled and down-flung, watching D'Arcy's pale fair face. There was a linen bandage binding back his flaxen hair, and the little face even in that still repose was

drawn in painful lines. By the window the hastily summoned doctor stood, talking in low tones to the nurse, and looking anxiously at Marion's bowed motionless figure.

Those looks smote Clowden's heart; there was pity, even fear, in them, as though he said, "Who shall tell her?" And the nurse, a middle-aged woman, who had known Marion a child, was weeping silently. Clowden knew how carefully Marion's life had been guarded from all sorrow, and his heart yearned towards her in this sudden, unexpected, desolate grief. But he—her husband—*dared not* go in and comfort her: a stranger's sympathy must soothe that woe, a stranger's voice must tell her its greatest bitterness.

Presently she rose up, pushing back her hair with trembling, impatient hands, and then he noticed the fearful change those

few hours had wrought in her delicate beauty. Her face was colourless, pallid, and fixed as marble; the eyes heavily dull; even the drawn lips had lost their soft, pink mobility. She looked like a woman newly risen from the dead, and he knew that Marion had passed through a bitterness worse than death. Could that woman be the radiant creature he had been so proud of but a few short hours since at the gay Court ball—the woman whose soft face had seemed to him fairer than all the acknowledged beautiful Belles!

“Why are you crying, Watson?” she said, in a hoarse, strange voice. “I cannot cry.”

The doctor went quickly to her side.

“My dear Lady Clowden,” he said, “you are worn out. Please lie down a little; there is no danger now—when he wakes he will be comparatively well.”

He took her cold hand in his, feeling the pulse. "This excitement is too much for you—you must rest. The little fellow is doing finely. I will come round again in an hour; will you lie down in the meantime?"

He spoke slowly and distinctly, but her poor eyes looked at him utterly void of expression.

"Will you lie down and rest?" he said again. "There is no danger, I assure you."

"No danger!" she cried, a sudden light in her face. "Did you say there was no danger?"

"Not the slightest danger, my dear Lady Clowden, unless he is excited; that might bring on fever. You will lie down, wont you—to be well when he wakes and asks for you?"

"He *will* live?" she asked, anxiously.

"I can safely say *yes*," he answered, emphatically; "as far as my power of knowing lies."

She threw herself down on her knees, there at his feet, thanking God in such words of earnest thrilling pathos, that the two men who heard her, hardened as they both were—the one by constant familiarity with sorrow, the other by the cynicism of his bad heart—drew back with bowed head and bated breath while that short prayer went up to heaven.

Clowden detained the doctor before he left the house, drawing him into the library. The physician, looking at his haggard face, thought, "That little life is very precious—an only child, I suppose;" but he did not know that the father's hand had caused all this sorrow.

“You think that the child will live?” Clowden asked, in a cold, composed voice ; but his eyes looked down full of painful anxiety. “You did not say so merely to pacify my wife? If you told her that lie, she will go mad when she finds how you have deceived her.” He laid his hand on the other’s arm, holding him with unconscious force. “Tell me the truth.”

“I would not deceive any one so cruelly,” he said, quickly. “To the best of my knowledge, your son will live ; but——”

“But !” Clowden cried. “What do you mean, man ?”

The doctor hesitated. He did not like to tell him that his son, little flaxen-haired D’Arcy, would never run about again ; that the poor child, lately so full of health and spirits, had injured his spine in that heavy fall down the hard stone step, and that he

would be a *cripple* for life. But he could not trifle with the desperate-faced man whose strong, brown hand held him with vice-like strength; so he told him, gently and simply, the sad truth.

Clowden's face grew livid to his very lips.

"Oh! God," he groaned, turning away, and shading his eyes with his hand. "And this is my doing!"

The doctor stood for a few moments. He had no words to comfort the stricken man, so he turned and went. He left the room with a backward look at that tall, motionless figure; left the house, glad to breathe the pure air of heaven, shaking the dust of its sorrow from off his feet.

* * * *

One day, D'Arcy had been ill about a week, when Clowden went up to the

nursery ; there was no one else in the room, and the little child lying in the big arm-chair, supported by pillows, looked very sickly and fragile ; he gave a glad cry of welcome when he saw his father, and Clowden's heart was very full when he felt the little thin arms clasped tightly round his neck.

“ My little darling,” he said, kneeling down by the chair, “ the doctor says you are much better to-day.”

“ When shall I get up again, papa ?” he lisped. “ I get so tired up here.”

“ Oh, you will get up soon, I hope, my darling,” he said, looking away ; he could not meet the trustful confidence of those large true eyes. “ Is there anything pretty you would like ?” and he glanced round at the heaped-up neglected toys.

“ I wish you would come up oftener,

papa;" and the little soft hand smoothed his face caressingly. "Dear papa."

Clowden laid his head down on the pillow, with D'Arcy's soft wee face against his; they did not talk, but now and then they kissed each other softly, and the child murmured, "Dear papa."

Clowden was feeling very penitent; all his better spirit was roused, and at that moment the tiny hand resting so gently on his face could have led him safely over the pitfalls of life.

Marion, coming suddenly into the room, paused with a low cry when she saw him there. There was a real horror in her face, and he could see that she feared him, feared him for D'Arcy's sake; suddenly he remembered his words—

"If you drive me from you, you shall repent it."

He and Marion had not spoken to each other since that day, and now he could see that she shrank from him, thinking perhaps that he had done this cruel deed on purpose. He went up to her.

"Marion," he said, "you surely have forgiven me; I have suffered as much as you have all this time."

"There is no question of forgiveness," she said, coldly; "I bear you no malice, but I can never forget."

"Then do you really wish me to go away?" he said, in a low hoarse voice.

"You may go or stay, as you like," she said, calmly; "I have no wish to control your actions."

"Then you are indifferent to my movements?" he asked, his eyes darkening with passion. "If you can never forgive me, say so."

She stood there, so cold and fair, so proud in her purity ; and yet, had she so willed it, she might almost have converted that dark hardened sinner who stood before her, outwardly so passionate and haughty, but inwardly a penitent, yearning for forgiveness. I think it was a bitterly atoned for sin that Marion committed, when she refused her pardon.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said. "It was not your fault, perhaps, that you loved me less than I had thought ; and as for the rest, God and D'Arcy alone can forgive you."

Remember, Lord Clowden was no meek-spirited saint, but a man cursed with hot passions, inherited from a long line of bad men, and those passions had been fostered by his mother's too trusting fondness and the evil example of his father ; so it was

small wonder that Marion's cold pitiless words roused his heart's blood in fierce anger. With an oath he had never uttered in her presence before, he turned and left the room : and by the setting of the next day's sun the deep blue sea rolled between him and the woman he had sworn to love and cherish.





CHAPTER III.



WHEN Lucy left the drawing-room her one idea was to get away—anywhere. She felt that she could never bear the shame of seeing Marion again. With trembling, hasty hands she changed her dress and put on her hat; and then with the stealthy step of a fugitive left the house where she had been received so kindly but a few short weeks since.

She walked on quickly, not stopping once till she reached Hyde Park; and then the great desolate expanse of Nature struck a cold chill through her, and she realised with overwhelming force that she was alone—

alone in the world! She sank down on a seat, weeping bitterly.

“Are you in any trouble, Miss?”

The insinuating, would-be sympathetic voice startled her; and she looked up to see a man—a stranger—bending over her. Poor Lucy! She felt that the world had no place for her; she could not even weep in peace; so she got up wearily, not even answering her would-be comforter, and walked on—on, on, stung by the bitterness of her position.

“What shall I do?” she asked herself again and again; but with the anxious question came no answer. She could not go back to Doolington Hall; she could even now feel the scorn of Marion’s eyes—Marion who had been so good to her! Vivien and little D’Arcy, too! Lucy could have wept again when she thought of them all; and

herself, a second Eve, exiled from Paradise, but exiled alone! That word *alone* had always seemed full of horror to Lucy; it had haunted her at her father's deathbed; and now, six years after, it had come back full of terrible reality.

She was indeed alone. No one in that great city, no one in the whole wide world, could she go to for sympathy or help; and yet it was only partially she realised the full meaning of her position. Years afterwards she would look back to that morning, pitying the Lucy who wandered so helplessly about, wondering how the girl had kept her reason; the very recollection of its utter loneliness, of its blank, unpromising future, would make her tremble even then, old as the memory was.

Lucy never knew before how large Hyde Park was; her ideas had been confined to

Kensington Gardens, and the narrow strip of fashion which aristocracy has rendered so exclusively "the Park ;" but now she seemed to be wandering in some vast, unending garden, till at last, wearied of its monotony, she passed through one of the gates, and walking dreamily, purposelessly on, found herself in Regent Street.

She had reached that stage of grief when the sorrow lies dormant, and we can be almost childishly interested in anything going on round us. It was now late in the morning, and the gay, ever-changing picture Regent Street presented absorbed all Lucy's attention ; so she walked on, a quiet, lady-like little woman ; and no one looking at the fair, slightly pale face would have thought that a few short hours since the girl's heart had been well-nigh broken, and would be again when the great woe came back.

It is only the old who can sorrow always : in youth we have that happy balm of Gilead, the blessing of a glad forgetfulness which, if only momentary, is full of refreshing comfort. In our bright youth we can shake off sorrow as the lark shakes off the earth-dew from its wings when it mounts skyward in fresh summer morning.

Suddenly, among the sea of strange faces, Lucy saw one that she knew—the face of Mathew Palmer. A little older-looking, a little graver, but for all that the same good, kind face that had been so full of honest sympathy in the past. He took her outstretched hand with the same half tender, wholly glad smile she knew so well ; it was too much for her now, and she turned away, the blue eyes full of tears.

“What is it? What is the matter, Lucy?” he said, uneasily, perfectly con-

scious of the interest several of the passers-by were taking in them—a tall, grave, young clergyman, and a fair, pretty girl holding his hand and weeping bitterly. Suddenly a bright idea struck him; so hailing a cab, he put Lucy in, and telling the man to drive to Park Lane, sat down by her side. “What is the matter, my dear Lucy?” he said, taking her hand kindly.

“Where are we going?” she asked, trying to hush her sobs.

“Why, to Park Lane! Lady Evelylin is in town, is she not? I am going to take you home.”

“I have no home!” she cried. “Lady Evelylin is at Doolington Hall. Oh! what shall I do, what shall I do!” and Lucy began sobbing again.

“Lady Evelylin at the Hall!” he said, in

VOL. II. 3

astonishment. "How is it that you are in London, Lucy?"

He waited till the girl's sobs died away, then he put the question again; and, after some little time, he got the whole story by degrees.

He sat very gravely still, his brows knitted, and his kind mouth drawn in thoughtful tense lines. Lucy sat still too; she was too tired to cry now, too worn out to care much what he thought of her; but his silence did seem strange, and she looked at him now and then, wondering at the sternness so foreign to his usually pleasant face. Suddenly he stopped the cab, and gave a new address in Brompton.

"Where are we going?" Lucy wearily asked.

He roused himself with an effort.

"I am going to take you to a house

where I once lodged myself; you can't wander about the streets. When you have had something to eat, and rested, we can talk about the future."

Lucy lay back in the cab; she began to realise how very hungry and exhausted she was. She was pained, too, at the abrupt, almost harsh tone in which he spoke. She did not know how her story had jarred this man's primitive ideas of womanly modesty; the very fact of her boldly owning to being in love with a married man, shocked him; and that she should have placed herself in the way of temptation by going to stay in the same house, he could not understand. He had thought Lucy so thoroughly pure-hearted, and he had loved her in the first place for her childish innocence, and utter freedom from all those dashing qualities that go to

make up what is commonly called a "girl of the period." This man, unknown to himself, had made a paragon of little Lucy Dashwood, judging other women by her standard, and now the desecration of his heart's idol was very bitter. Of course he only judged from the outward circumstances; he could not look into the girl's heart, and see how wholly free from guile it was.

In perfect silence they drove up to a quiet-looking square of houses; on the door of one of them Mr. Palmer knocked, and after a brief parley with the landlady, Lucy was shown into the parlours, and told that they were her home for the present. Tinselly, unhomelike, lodging-house parlours, they struck a cold chill through her as she entered. After ordering some lunch to be served immediately, Mr. Palmer took leave of her, promising to call the next morning.

That lonely day ! how long it seemed to Lucy, accustomed as she was to constant companionship. She spent most of the time in wandering up and down the two little rooms that led into each other, and opening now and then one of the dingy books that adorned the tables and sideboards. Once her perambulations led her to the looking-glass, and there, crushed and broken, half hidden in her golden hair, she saw the rose Clowden had given her. She took it out, placing it tenderly in her pocket-book ; in spite of all that had passed, that faded flower was precious—the gift of a man whose unholy love had blighted her life ! Oh ! Love, omnipotent is thy power ! Tyranny but adds to it ; suffering but endears it ; even in the greatest depth of human woe, the heart responds like a well-strung harp to the touch of thy master hand !

It was rather late the next morning when Mr. Palmer came, and Lucy, who had been looking eagerly for him, was already attired in her out-door apparel, even to her gloves; he smiled when he saw these evident preparations for leaving.

“Are you already so tired of your quarters?” he said. “But sit down, Lucy, I want to talk to you a little. What is it you intend doing? Have you any relation?”

“No,” she said, almost sharply; “I am quite alone in the world, and if I had any relations I would not go to them now.”

He looked at her in pained astonishment. He had never found Lucy Dashwood flippanant before; he did not know how journeying on the road of life even a few yards with Despair, can alter the softest character.

“ My dear Lucy,” he said, gently, “ I am not questioning you merely from curiosity ; I have thought of a plan for you, but I wanted to know first what you had yourself thought of doing.”

“ What I had thought of doing !” she said, rising and standing before him, her blue eyes sparkling, and a bright carmine glow on each cheek, looking, he thought, a beautiful picture of hope and determination. “ What have many other homeless, penniless women done ! I had thought of the only occupation left to us—of being a governess. I was looking in the *Times* this morning, and I am going to answer two advertisements : one in Camberwell, to teach six children ; the other at Hampstead, offering fifteen shillings a week to any lady competent to teach English, French, music, drawing and all the other etceteras. Do you

think," she added, dropping her half bantering tone, and speaking anxiously, "that I could live on *fifteen shillings a week*?"

"No, I don't," he said, gravely. "And I am sure you would not be happy leading the harassed life of a daily go-vernness."

"Happy!" she said, laughing unpleasantly; "I did not include happiness among the necessary items of life—life that I am going to pay for out of fifteen shillings a week!"

Suddenly her laughter died away in a wild burst of hysterical weeping. He drew her gently down by his side on the sofa, and waited in pained patience till the storm of sobs was over; then when she looked up, white-faced and red-eyed, he said, "Shall I tell you my plan?"

"Yes," she said, meekly; the sudden

bitter spirit born of her sorrow had quite gone now.

“Would you like to go abroad, Lucy?”

“Yes, rather,” she said, indifferently.

“Why?”

“Because——” he hesitated a little, and then continued quickly—“a lady I know, quite young and a widow, mentioned to me the other day that she wanted a companion to travel with her; would you like it, Lucy? She is a very nice person indeed.”

Lucy thought a few moments, and then she said, gravely, “Thank you; it was a very kind thought. Of course she must see me before we can decide.”

“I am glad you like the idea,” he said, rising and looking very much relieved; “I will go round to her this morning. She is staying at a boarding-house not far from here.”


“He no longer loves me,” Lucy thought, with just a wee bit of a woman’s wounded vanity, as she stood at the little window and watched him cross the square; “I am so vile that no one can like me when they know all. Oh! Clowden, Clowden, why did you teach me to love you?”

She little thought, as she sat weeping there, that Mathew, good honourable man that he was, had hidden his love from a delicate, chivalrous fear of seeming to take advantage of her isolated helpless position.

“When she is happy with Mrs. Bruce, and independent, then I will ask her to be my wife, again; my poor little Lucy,” he thought, as he walked across the trim, narrow square.



CHAPTER IV.

LOWDEN went to Paris, but he could not stay there. What was there in Paris to compare with all he had left behind !

This Sybarite had wandered before in the wilderness ; he had already rubbed the brilliant bloom from all its tempting fruit, he had already bitten its bitter ashes. When he left Marion he knew in his heart of hearts the doom he had braved. If that weary butterfly hunt of miraged pleasure had seemed hollow before, what would it be now ? Oh, God ! what would it be now ? The world's dreary desert, peopled with

bright beautiful life, but *for him* panorama life, fleeting and taunting. He would be in the world, but not of it; a ghost that had no part or parcel in the noisy hubbub round him. Before he had pursued pleasure to find pleasure, but now he knew where *alone* not pleasure only, but real happiness, was to be found—by the side of that woman whose pure heart had cast him off in horror when she knew how unworthy he was.

His love for Isabelle had been all passion, and as passion had died, leaving a bitter memory, a bitter remorse, to sting him through life; but he had loved Marion as a man loves but once; he had loved her, almost unconsciously idolising her in his great, deep love. She had been his religion—a real living Bible it had seemed to him confirming the soul's eternity. He had wandered through many dreary wastes,

proving the worthlessness of all that seemed pure and good, before he met Marion ; and she, like a sudden light of realised hope, had risen bright and beautiful from the cold grey ashes of disappointment. Clowden, though young in years, had been sadly weary before she had gladdened and perfected his life. His dream of goodness ! And in this man's soul there dwelt a yearning for the good ; it may have been a poetical instinct and appreciation, or perhaps it was a tiny gleam from the great light slanting across his moral gloom. And his wife had realised that yearning ; she had seemed to him a saint—a woman whose religion never glared, dazzling the world's eye, but shone always clear and true, illuminating the path she and those nearer to her trod. A religion that needed no sackcloth, no hermitage to hallow it, but could

frequent earth's pageant, don its purple, and still keep its primeval purity ; and even that sudden bitter exhibition of temper had scarcely lowered Marion in her husband's estimation. From the height of her purity she had judged him hardly, was the excuse he made for her. He could not tear his idol from its throne and leave the inner temple of his heart bare and desolate ; and perhaps it was better to venerate an inferior thing than to venerate nothing.

He had been so happy in that innocent life with Marion ; and at what a pitiful altar had he sacrificed the blessing that came, as it were, late in life ; for his heart was old when he loved her. In one moment of lawless passion, in one moment when the demons who had slumbered for six years rose to complete this man's ruin, he had dashed the precious cup from his lips.

What was there in Lucy Dashwood that he should have imperilled his happiness for her? Ah! the selfishness of man, from Adam downwards—ever ready to lay the blame at poor Eve's door!


This little flirtation with Lucy to be so bitterly atoned for! Did he love her?—had he ever loved her? No! a thousand times no! thundered his heart. And yet, Clowden Strafford, you blighted that girl's life, and you well-nigh broke her heart! So spoke his conscience, and to still its voice he went back to the glittering valley of dissipation, though the shine was all gone, and the sun of its delusions had sunk for ever for him.

He travelled restlessly, visiting all the spots where he and Marion had been so happy, and then leaving them impatiently, feeling a curse upon him dire and deep as

that pronounced in old Jerusalem on her blasphemous son. Yes, he was a wanderer, a homeless wanderer; for what is home but the tent that shelters our heart's group?

"Was this the *curse*?" he asked himself—that curse he had never forgotten, though time had softened the self-reproach with which he first heard it—the curse those scarlet lips had evoked on his cruel baseness. Was that dead woman still calling from the grave for vengeance? As he had meted to Isabelle, so it came back to him—utter loneliness!

She had wandered homeless, heartbroken and alone—a beautiful, fragile girl. The lips were closed for ever that might have told the sad, dark story of those wanderings; and when he last saw her the calm holiness of death had obliterated all stamp of earth's sorrows and earth's wrongs.



Alone! Could her loneliness have been more utter than his own? His, the loneliness of a misanthropic heart, bowed but not broken by sorrow—a heart yearning for sympathy, but a heart that would have resented sympathy as a deadly insult. *Hers!* Oh! God, what had hers been?

There was poetry in his isolation, bitter enough, but still with a dirge-like romance that made the sorrow all his own—a thing to cherish and brood over. But hers had been nothing but a horrible reality, the intercourse of a pampered, untried, passionate spirit, with the sordid, unsympathetic side of life. She had gone from him penniless, leaving even her jewels behind, to the very rings she wore constantly; she flung off her trinkets, leaving them broken where they fell; and what had she done? Out in the great, hard

world, whose watchword is money, whose god is money, whose compensation for every ill, for every insult, is money; the yellow demon, who stamps men's faces and hardens men's hearts; the tempter, the avenger, the consoler in life's deep tragedy!

What had she done? In his loneliness the question forced itself upon him; he had waved it off before, but now, brought face to face with utter, hopeless loneliness, his heart woke in sympathy for that wronged, dead woman. Dead! Ah! that was a blessing—dead in early youth. And yet, had he found her alive, could he have given back the rich promise of her girlhood? He shuddered when that thought came. He would have had to make some atonement, for she was his wife in the eyes of that master, "the law;" and then he would have lost Marion—Marion, who was too

good to be his. Might it not have been better so? But in his heart he realised the poet's words—

"Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.

Yes, it was better to have tasted that quiet happy love, than to have gone through life unblest by its rich treasures; it had been like a painting you must look at long, to discover its many perfect touches; like a flower whose perfume you must inhale by degrees, to find out its subtle sweetness.

He could at least lock his sorrow in his own breast; but Isabelle, had she gone back to the home of her childhood, must have been wounded often in that sorrow's tenderest spot—her shame.

Her dying in poverty at the Doolington

Arms seemed to answer for her not having gone back to her friends. What had she done then? Had she gone on the stage, her wonderfully weirdly sweet voice would have made any manager's fortune: he remembered how, in his first search for her, he had frequented all the theatres in London and Paris, scanning each actress for her familiar face. It had seemed natural for a romantic girl, clever and beautiful, and above all a French girl, to think of being an actress. He could remember how the grand eyes had lit up, and all the passionate poetic nature kindled in the sweet dusk face, when he had taken her to see the triumphs of the Parisian drama; how the rich voice had warbled for days airs heard at the Italian operas. Often, *now*, the memory of her winning loveliness, exhaustless French gaiety, and tender ro-

mantic love would return to him from the grave, and he felt that he deserved his punishment, this bitter isolation. Yes, he could find time to pity Isabelle now; that poor child he had taken from school, married, and driven from him! How had she fared in the great busy world—wilful, passionate, and very beautiful. Had she been a governess, a sempstress, a shop-woman——

Dr. Blake had said it was constant semi-starvation that killed her. He had drowned that reproach in his happy wedded life; but it haunted him now. She had had to work, some meagre, ill-paid work—work, that hard task-master in sorrow. That weary cry for “leisure to weep” had been hers perhaps; but *he* could weep all day, could tears soothe his heart’s loneliness.

This could hardly be his retribution.

She had suffered more than he had; the taking from him all he loved best was only a return. When this unexpressed fear of further vengeance came to him, he would say, "She was not alone, she had Vivien."

The son whose birth he had not heard of till the mother lay dead! And he felt a longing for that child. What a bright companion he would be! thought the lonely man. He could superintend his studies, carefully shut out all evil from his young life, compensate by his devotion to the son the wrong he did the mother. But it was not to be; and Clowden laughed out-loud at himself, in bitter mockery. A grown man, hungering for the companionship of a little child!

And his other son, poor wee D'Arcy: he could not think of him without a bitter

heart-ache ; the pressure of those thin little arms clung to him for many a long year ; and often his eyes would grow misty when he thought of the loving, gentle child, growing up to a blighted manhood.





CHAPTER V.


MRS. BRUCE was a bright-eyed, brown-faced little woman, shorter even than Lucy, with a pleasant mouth, full of even, sparkling teeth, and a gay *empresé*, almost French manner. Bombazine and crape seemed to suit the tight little figure to perfection, and her tiny apology for a widow's cap sat very jauntily on her elaborately coiled dark hair.

The deceased Mr. Bruce had been a stockbroker, middle-aged and well-to-do; he had died some twelve months back, and his widow still mourned him in the most becoming weeds that millinery art could

effect. Such was the little lady Lucy Dashwood went to, in the capacity of a paid companion.

“Mr. Palmer made a mistake,” she chirped; “it is not for myself I am seeking a companion, but for my aunt, Mrs. Gordon, who is quite an invalid. Perhaps, Miss Dashwood, you might object to being companion to an invalid? My aunt is very patient and resigned, although she has been afflicted for many years.”

Lucy thought of her father, and it did not seem very distasteful, the occupation of cheering some poor invalid’s solitude. So it was arranged; and before the week was out Lucy found herself on board the steamer speeding from Folkestone to Boulogne, where Mrs. Gordon lived, in a pretty, thoroughly English house, in the Hauteville. Her husband had been the Pro-



testant minister, and had built the house some ten years back, in copy of the one he had left in the mother-country; for the Rev. John Gordon had possessed a rooted antipathy to anything foreign, and only accepted the Boulogne living on the doctors advising his wife's residence in France. Mrs. Gordon had been on the sick-list for years, but in spite of that the invalid outlived her robust husband, who caught a low fever in his ministration, and died a few years from his landing in France.

All their children were now dead except one son, and concerning "Captain Jack" Mrs. Bruce had a little romance, which she soon confided to Lucy. There had been a boy and girl engagement between them, but Fate, in the shape of an unrelenting father, had early united her to Mr. Bruce; and now that he was dead, his widow's

heart went back faithfully to her girlhood lover ; and a second engagement, more fortunate they hoped than the first, had proved the constancy of their love-troth.

Before they arrived Lucy was quite prepossessed in favour of the "warrior lover," in whose praise Mary Bruce thought she could never say enough. He turned out to be a commonplace young Englishman, blue-eyed and yellow-haired ; very proud of his plunger's swagger, and his drooping amber moustache ; one of those happy-go-lucky, good-natured beings who are always made the hack of at rural picnics ; who are always picked out by anxious *châtelaines* to dance with plain girls ; one of those pleasant, cheery-hearted men, in short, who are the stay to society, because they accept its tiny evils without looking like martyrs : very useful in their

generation, but only carelessly recognised as that "good-natured So-and-so, who'll do anything you ask him." Such was Jack Gordon, Captain in Her Majesty's Horse-guards; such was the man with whom Mary Bruce would shortly wed; and no one, knowing the pair, could doubt that the marriage would be a happy one.

Mrs. Gordon was one of those sweet patient characters that often blossom in the close atmosphere of bodily affliction; her soft womanly face bore the stamp of sickness and suffering, but from the clear, kind eyes shone a look very familiar to Lucy—the calm perfect peace that dwelt in Lady Evylin's face. It is strange but true that the "children of the kingdom" have often that in common—the stamp of their heritage—a holy, peaceful expression. I have seen it in soft, refined faces; I have

seen it shining through the rugged lines of toil, through the painful traces of deep sin and bitter repentance ; but there has always been a mysterious "something," connecting and distinct, by which it is to be recognised.

Our Lucy possessed that rare gift, infinite patience and sympathy with illness ; the touch of her cool, soft hands, her quiet voice and light footfall, were invaluable in the sick-room. There were times of pain, when Mrs. Gordon sadly needed a ministering angel such as she found in Lucy ; her attendance was quite voluntary, for she had only been engaged to read to and walk out with the invalid ; and Mrs. Gordon, finding how gentle and thoughtful Lucy was, grew very fond of her. "Had my little Alice lived, she would have been something like you," she said ; "she was so

different to my other noisy darlings!" So she often called her "Alice," and I think Lucy rather liked her new name.

But it was not all work for Lucy; there was now and then a picnic to the shady old wood, and often a pleasant mustering of British residents at some agreeable *soirée*, or gay ball. Two or three young Englishmen began to fancy themselves in love with "that pretty Miss Dashwood," who could hardly help smiling often, at the ludicrous expressions these youths thought the necessary accompaniment of the tender passion. Poor Lucy, whose heart had long ago learnt all Love's lore! Often there were quiet little evenings at home, when Mrs. Gordon dozed in her chair, and the reunited lovers talked in low whispers, while Lucy sat at the piano playing soft German melodies, or singing those dear old English ballads her

father had loved so in their little cottage home. Any girl, heart whole and fancy free, might have been happy in Lucy's new home ; but to her, with the cankering grief for ever eating away her heart, the comparative solitude the piano afforded was a looked-for luxury ; she could drown care and *thought* in those tender old songs, and the three listeners were never weary of the low sweet voice, with the poor sad heart now and then bringing out the melody as they had never realised it before.

"If your voice was only a little more powerful, my dear, it would be your fortune," Mrs. Gordon often said ; "but for drawing-room singing, I like it best as it is."

Our Lucy was only a household pet ; she would never have made fame or fortune in the big busy world. She was made to be the loving light of some happy home. I

like to think of her in the "might have been." My poor little Lucy! I like to think of her, cared for and loved by the fond true heart that would have cherished her, had not Clowden Strafford stepped in between them.

The Rev. John Gordon had called his residence "Myrtle House," and the name did not sound *so* very heathenish in this semi-English continental seaport. It was a pretty place enough; you would see many such in a perambulation through St. John's Wood, Hampstead, or Upper Norwood; the house standing, villa fashion, in a prettily laid-out parterre, enclosed by a long wall; two large, open-pattern, filigree iron gates opening on the approach. But it looked isolated, as though it had been put down, ready built, haphazard. The great fault of amateur planners, that they

generally choose their ground most injudiciously, often giving a really noble-looking building a ludicrous resemblance to those little paper houses we used to build on the large round dining-room table, in the days of our childhood.

The only house near was a grand old *château*, surrounded by acres of woody ground. From the window of her own room Lucy had often speculated on the dwellers of this dark old pile. She could see very little of the house—the trees guarded it so jealously—except one portion which was built in the shape of a tower, and rose very high. Seen from some distance it seemed to meet the sky-line, like a second tower of Babel prying into the dark mysteries of cloudy air.

One day Lucy asked Mrs. Bruce if any one lived there.

“Oh yes,” she answered. “Monsieur De Chambray, an old French bachelor. He is a great student, and they say a great miser also. I will take you to see him, if you like. He is quite a specimen of antiquity, always reminding me of those dreadful old men one reads about, who tried to discover the elixir of youth, and let their real youth go by in the search.”

“Why, Mary, you are hard on him,” laughed the Captain. “I don’t think he can be so very old, his eyes are so bright.”

“Yes, his eyes are too bright; they startle me. You must see him, Miss Dashwood,” continued the little widow; “and you know, Jack, we ought really to call on him, if only for politeness—it’s ages since we’ve been. He has some wonderful curiosities, and a splendid picture-gallery. And, Miss Dashwood, you can’t imagine how re-

freshing the view from the tower chamber is. He is such an odd old person, and lives all alone in that castle-like house, with only two old servants. We are almost the only people he allows to visit him. Jack and I made his friendship when we were quite children, and he always seems very glad to see us."





CHAPTER VI.



LUCY felt very curious as they stood outside the little iron door, cut in the solid masonry that enclosed the *château* grounds. A bent old man answered their ring, and led them by winding pathways up to the house; she was painfully struck by the uncared-for, neglected appearance; their very footfalls seemed to awaken echoes in the damp air, and the pathways were overgrown with grass and tall weeds; they seemed like the prince in the fairy tale, rousing the castle that had slept for a hundred years.

They passed through a low arched door-

way into a large square room, with little diamond-paned windows. The floor was of highly-polished oak, and at one end yawned a large fireplace, where, on a couple of iron dogs, lay a blazing log, scarcely warming the room, though the weather was still very mild; but the woody wilderness outside shut out all sunlight. There was very little furniture, and what there was had been arranged close to the wall, leaving a clear open space in the centre of the apartment.

“A gloomy old hole, is it not?” Captain Gordon whispered to Lucy.

She had no time to answer, for the master of the house entered at that moment.

He presented a most singular appearance, tall to gauntness; but it was easy to see that the figure once, when filled out, must have been very fine; indeed, the bowed,

stooping shoulders hardly hid the deep broad chest. There was the look of a grand ruin about the man ; but it seemed as though the power that should have been had dwindled away in inaction, as though the brain had despised the body, and at times almost forgotten it. If the form spoke thus loudly, the face was even more eloquent in its patient protest, that Nature should have encased a scholar's spirit in a warrior's form. The large, clear-cut features might have been very handsome, but for the shrunken pallor of his complexion ; and the eyes, as Mrs. Bruce said, were too bright ; they were sunken deeply, with a fixed eager fire in them, as though his mind was bent on some one object, and never turned aside or strayed. He wore a long, dark, shapeless coat, and from the border of a small black velvet skull-cap his scanty

grey hair escaped, quite long for a man, reaching almost to his shoulders. The long, thin face was shaven closely, leaving the massive chin quite bare. Years back, Ferdinand De Chambray would have been taken for a wizard, from his very looks. His study was chemistry, and there were stains on his shapely hands that not all the rivers in Europe would ever wash out.

He received them with a courteous air of old-world politeness, doing the honours of the house himself. He spoke English well; there was music still in the deep rich voice, but it was the music of an instrument seldom touched—a certain want of harmony jarred upon the ear.

He had a collection of curious costly trifles that would have enriched any museum; but what pleased Lucy most,

was the delightful view from the turret chamber. It was a round room, half way up the tower. Monsieur De Chambray told them it would not be safe to go any higher, as the place was very old, and several of the steps had fallen away.

Looking from the window, the eye wandered over the shady ramparts; over the little town, half girt by dazzling silver waves, far away to the British coast-line, with Dover's chalky cliffs standing out in clear relief from the deep mauve, misty background. Lucy's face, always expressive, lit up with pleasure, rosy and dimpled, at this fair scene, bright with Nature's vivid tints and Nature's varying loveliness.

"Oh, England," she cried, "dear old England! This is indeed a pleasure, monsieur."

He looked pleased, and a faint shadowy smile strayed like a pale sunbeam over his wintry face.

“It will be an honour,” he said, bowing, “if mademoiselle will do me the favour to come often to my tower.”

The picture-gallery was very long, running the whole length of one side of the house; it was full of gems of art, many of them by old masters. Enamels by Augustine; celestial visions by Michael Angelo and Guido; sea-pieces by Vernet; and several family portraits, most of them bearing the Watteau stamp. Before one of these Lucy stopped—a fair, young, dainty shepherdess, resting on her crook; while far away wandered her woolly charges, and one pet lamb, flower-chained, nestled by her side. It was not the beauty of the picture that caught her attention, but *a something*

wonderfully familiar in the soft, saucy, dark eyes, in the rounded chin and slender Greek nose ; and, by degrees, that *something* took shape and substance, and Vivien Stanley's beautiful face came back to her.

"Mademoiselle admires that picture? It is a portrait of my only sister."

The Frenchman's low voice startled her, and she answered, quickly—

"It reminds me of Vivien Stanley; a little boy I knew in England."

Monsieur De Chambray's face lit up with sudden interest.

"Vivien Stanley! did you say, mademoiselle? My niece, Isabelle D'Almez, married a countryman of yours called Vivien Stanley."

"Yes," Lucy cried; "his mother's name was Isabelle. That is the name on her tombstone—Isabelle Stanley. How strange

that I should know your grand-nephew, monsieur !”

“ Isabelle is dead, then ?” he asked.

“ Oh ! did not you know ?” And Lucy looked up, full of contrition, for having spoken so thoughtlessly ; but the man’s eyes were bent on the ground. Presently he raised them, saying—

“ And Monsieur Stanley, do you know him, mademoiselle ?”

“ He is dead too,” Lucy answered. “ Vivien is an orphan ; Lady Evylin adopted him ; she was an old schoolfellow of his mother’s.”

As the Captain and Mrs. Bruce came up, they dropped the subject for the time ; but when they were leaving, Monsieur De Chambray said—

“ Will you give me the name and address of your good countrywoman, mademoiselle ?”

And Lucy wrote it down on a leaf from her pocket-book.

* * * * *

When Lucy had been at Boulogne a year, the great event took place—the wedding. Mathew Palmer came over from England to be present at the ceremony, and he stayed a week in the little French town, spending most of his time at Mrs. Gordon's ; she and Lucy, to tell the truth, were feeling very lonely just then, after the bustle and gaiety of the marriage, and welcomed him very warmly. Mrs. Gordon had known him when he was quite a child ; so, finding how pleasant her house seemed to him, and guessing the cause, gave him *carte blanche* to stay there whenever he felt inclined to visit Boulogne. He accepted her invitation with a sad smile ; he knew Boulogne could only be attractive for the

sake of his little blue-eyed love, for so he always called her in his heart; but the poor fellow now, as before, realised that Lucy was not to be won—that her whole true heart had gone out long ago to the pitiless villain who trifled with its purity.

The morning he said good-by, before returning to England, he whispered to Lucy—

“Is there no hope for me?”

And she answered, very gently—

“No.”





CHAPTER VII.

THEY led a very quiet life at the old Hall, Sir John and his two daughters, for Marion went back to her father when Clowden left her. At first Lady Evylin had been secretly anxious about Lucy, till a short note reached her from Mr. Palmer to say that she had gone abroad as companion to a widow lady; further he did not think it his duty to tell, and Carrie was obliged to rest content with this meagre information about the girl she had loved almost as a sister.

Vivien had gone to school now. He wished to be a soldier, and Lady Evylin

meant to indulge the whim. Little D'Arcy, they felt, was better at home ; they could not bear to send the child from them, so they engaged a tutor for him—a quiet, grave young man, who made his studies as pleasant as possible. Not that D'Arcy needed any coaxing to do as he was bid : many children would have been sadly spoilt in the loving atmosphere in which he lived, but the little boy was very docile and obedient, always leaning on a stronger will.

No visitors ever stayed at the Hall now ; the Squire found Marion's companionship all in all. He was getting old and feeble, and felt that the happy old "Tally-ho!" days were over for him ; but though he knew he should never mount them again, he still kept the dear old hunters, and visited them fondly every day.

As the uneventful years crept on, there came a change over Marion Strafford. Her soft transparent cheek grew more transparent, tinted by a beautiful pale-pink glow; her gentle eyes grew luminous and strangely bright; yet, in spite of this and a hacking cough that kept her awake night after night, those two, who loved her so, failed to notice the presence of that insidious disease that had eaten away her mother's life—consumption; and while they wondered at her growing beauty, she was slowly fading away before their eyes.

So they lived, almost dating the time by Vivien's holidays. They all felt the bright influence of this fresh young life; his high spirits, his merry tales of school life, his beautiful bonnie face glowing with perfect health, all burst like a sunbeam on the dull old Hall; and while he stayed there, his

heartly laugh rang hourly through the house, mirthful and mirth-provoking. It was a pleasant sight to see him with little D'Arcy; the passionate hasty spirit, quick to feel, and quick to retaliate, bent in utter submission to every whim of the afflicted child; there would come a softness, almost womanly, over the bright bold face, when he was with him; there was no sacrifice he would not willingly, and at all times, make for D'Arcy, who regarded him as a hero, a being to be imitated as much as possible.

So the years passed, and Vivien grew into manhood, well loved by those who knew him thoroughly, singularly pure of heart, and very beautiful to look upon. A face full of winning nobility, perfectly outlined, and in repose, shadowed by a great determination. Time had darkened his hair to a deep brown, and through the sun-tan the

warm blood mounted in a ruddy glow. His twenty-first birthday found him a subaltern in Her Majesty's 25th, a marching regiment it is true, and under orders for foreign service, but what did Vivien care! He had no fortune to waste in city dissipation; he was young and ardent, longing for action, loving his profession with a true soldier's zeal. Sir John and Carrie had sent their boy out into the world provided with sufficient to enjoy life without abusing it; they had not wished the bright young spirit to be hampered with debts, and they trusted to his good sense to keep free of extravagance.

"We must leave him alone for a short time, my dear," the old Squire said, quieting Lady Evylin's anxiety; "the world can't harm him, unless he allows it to. Boys will have their fling, and it

decides their character. Don't you worry yourself, even if he should go a little wrong, he'll be all the better for it in after life."

Carrie took his advice, and worried Vivien with no home lectures in the long letters she often sent him. But she need have been under no apprehension; fashionable vices found no sympathy in the young man's heart. Yet men liked him, from the extravagant scrapegrace, sinking a goodly rent roll, in thoughtless gaiety, to the hardened old *roué*, all had a good word for Vivien Stanley; recognising the sterling good, in his bright genial disposition, and respecting it.

The little parcel Isabelle had asked Carrie to keep for her son till he was of age weighed very heavily on her mind; she dreaded to cloud that glad young life with the knowledge of his mother's sorrow,

Vivien was spending his short leave at the Hall preparatory to embarking for Indian service, and Lady Evlyn felt she could no longer keep the packet from him, so with a mind full of sad misgivings she stood by her *boudoir* window, watching him return from his morning ride. The perfect grace with which he sat his horse, the noble, well-knit figure, the flushed young face, made up a bright, beautiful picture; and almost involuntarily Carrie echoed Sir John's oft-repeated wish, "Would to God that lad was my heir."

A few moments later he entered the room, saying, "Thorne said you wanted me, dear mother."

She went up to him, taking both his hands in hers. She was tall for her sex, but she felt quite a little woman standing near Vivien Stanley.

“You have been happy with us, my boy?” she asked, almost wistfully; a strange feeling she could not understand, had come over her; she felt as though, in giving him that parcel his dead mother had left, she resigned all claim to the fond, true love he had gladdened her life with.

He took her in his arms.

“Dear little mother, you have made me only too happy,” and a tremor shook the strong young frame as he kissed her, for the tears were raining down Lady Evelylin’s face.

She drew him down by her side on a sofa, trying to smile.

“I am childishly weak, Vivien, but I dread to break the calm of your life. You are going away, and we may not meet again for many years, so it is my duty to fulfil the last promise I made to your dear mother. Do you remember her at all?”

"Yes," he said, in a low voice; "she often comes to me in my dreams, a sweet, dark face, with large, sad eyes."

"When first I knew your mother," Lady Evylin continued, "she was a very beautiful child; we were schoolfellows, and grew up together. I loved her very much indeed, and when she left school to marry your father, I thought my heart would have broken."

"Did you know my father?" he asked.

She looked at the fresh, pure face; she could not tell him that his mother *eloped* from school, it seemed sacrilege to rake up any memories detrimental to their loved dead.

"No, dear," she said, "I did not even know your mother's married name till I met her, by chance, a few years after she left school. She promised me then, if ever

she needed a friend, that she would come to me, and I did not see her again till the day she died."

"Was my father dead then?" he questioned. "I don't remember *him*."

"I don't think he was dead then, Vivien; and he may be alive now."

The young man started.

"My father alive, and I not know him! What do you mean, Lady Evlyn?"

"That is what I dreaded to tell you, my darling," she said, taking his hand between both hers, the cool, soft touch, calming him to listen to her. "Your father treated your poor mother very cruelly, and she left him. He told her that she was not his wife. A woman of the world would have waited to prove it, but your poor mother, an inexperienced child, only eighteen years of age, fled from him in her first horror."

"*And was she his wife?*" Vivien asked, in a quick, hoarse whisper.

All the ruddy bloom had left his stricken, anxious face.

"On her deathbed she said she was," Carrie answered, simply.

He rose up staggering to his feet. The white altered face smote her to the heart.

"I would never have told you, darling," she cried, "but your mother asked me to give you this little packet. I thought you had better know *all* before you opened it."

"Thank you," he said, taking the parcel wearily, as though his brain was numbed for the time by this sudden, unexpected blow.

He had had vague ideas that his father had been a poor struggling professional man, who had died early, leaving his wife penniless, as many professional men's

widows are left. Why he had thought so, he could not have told, but the idea had become a settled conviction ; and now to hear that his father was most probably alive—that he had driven his girl-wife from him—that he had never owned himself his son ! And then—oh, horrible thought!—might it not be true, that cruel taunt, the father he had never seen, had flung at his mother ?

He stood there, his eyes bent on the ground, his pale face quivering with passionate agony. Carrie watched him, her kind blue eyes dim with tears. She would have given much to have claimed him as her son. She had loved him for sixteen long years, with all a mother's love, comforting his boyish sorrows ; but now she was helpless to soothe his manhood's grief. She went up to him saying gently—

“Open that parcel, Vivien, in your own room; perhaps it may clear up the mystery.” Then she added, almost timidly, “Your mother, when she was dying, told you to avenge her, to bring retribution on your father. Will you try, my boy, to leave revenge in *God’s* hands? Perhaps in that parcel your mother may tell you to bring vengeance on the man who made her so unhappy; but, Vivien, always remember this—that there is a just God, who has said ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ and ‘He is not a man that He should lie.’”





CHAPTER VIII.



WITH tender, loving hands Vivien opened the sealed packet. It contained his mother's marriage certificate, the register of his own birth, a miniature case, and a letter.

The morocco-case held two portraits, one of Lord Clowden, which he did not recognise, and the other of his mother; he knew it at once. Though so very young when she died, the beautiful dark face came back to him as he looked. The artist had done full justice to Isabelle's rare loveliness, and the large, heavy fringed, orient eyes, delicate, regular features, and sweet smiling mouth,

were all painted with life-like accuracy. "Oh, mother! my beautiful mother!" he sobbed, pressing the ivory to his lips. "Oh, mother!"

His mother's hand had last held that portrait, his mother's wan face had last gazed on its girlish beauty; and Vivien rested his head on his arm, sobbing bitterly, wearily; yearning for the touch of that dead mother's hand, yearning for the fond pressure of that dead mother's lips. He raised his tear-stained face at last and took up the letter; it was written in a neat French hand, and in paragraphs, as though it had not been written all at once, but at different times. It began—

"MY DEAR CHILD, MY BEAUTIFUL BOY—

"In my great sorrow, my *only* solace, my *only* comfort. I don't fancy, darling, that I shall live long, and I am going to write all

my wrongs, and I hope, when you are a man, Vivien, that you will *revenge* them. You are so wee, my baby, and your little face just reaches the table I am writing on, your big eyes are watching my pen, and even in writing these few lines I have stopped often to kiss you, my dear little boy. Yet small as you are now, I have faith that this will fall into your hands when you are big and broad-shouldered; and, oh! Vivien, how earnestly I trust that your manhood will find you pure-hearted, and that Fate will treat you better than it has treated your mother, my Vivien.

“I was an orphan, my parents died when I was so young that I have no memory of them. I lived with an uncle, my mother’s brother; he was many years older than my mother, and her marriage had not pleased him, but still he adopted me at her death.

I think he tried to be kind to me, but he was a student and a recluse, and sometimes I did not see him for days, so my life was very lonely and uneventful till I went to school.

“When I was seventeen, I met your father; I cannot tell you, dear child, how fondly I loved him, he was so handsome—so like all my ideas of what a hero should be, so perfect in every way to my school-girl mind! In my mad, romantic infatuation, I stole away from school and married him. Yes, Vivien, whatever they may tell you, I and your father were legally married. For some months we were very happy; your father was the most devoted of lovers, and I—I fairly worshipped him! His slightest wish was my law, there was never a thought in my heart that was not of him. I suppose I was silly and

romantic, for I liked to be alone to think of him, and sometimes I would take long, lonely rambles, and tell myself how happy I was; and often I used to try and fancy myself the heroines of the old-world love stories he would tell me in the twilight. I was returning one evening from one of these foolishly happy walks, when I saw your father standing talking to a woman whom I knew by sight, as she was staying at the same hotel as ourselves. Your father had told me that she was quite a stranger to him; judge, then, my child, with what mingled feelings of anger and surprise I saw him bend down and kiss her!

“I did not wait a moment longer, but turned and went home by another road. When he came in, I taxed him with it, scarcely knowing what I said in my angry, burning passion. He answered me quite

calmly (oh ! the words, they have burnt into my heart like letters of fire), ‘ You may spare yourself all future reproaches, madam, *you are not my wife*, our marriage is not worth that !’ and he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

“ Oh ! child, had I killed him as he stood there, with a calm, cruel sneer on his face, I should hardly have satisfied the frenzy that held me speechless. When at last words came, I cursed him. Remember, Vivien, your father is a *cursed man*, and I charge you to accept no love from him ; to touch no gold of *his*, even if you are starving, but I trust God will protect my child from the horror of want ; *that* even has not been spared me.

“ I left your father ; I travelled night and day, till I reached London, and then, penniless, helpless, homeless, I fainted in the

streets, and recovered to find myself lying in a workhouse bed !

“ When they saw my eyes were open, they put *you* in my arms, my baby. I pressed you to me with a strange thrill of joy, and then I wept to think that you would know no father’s name.

“ There was a lady who used to come and sit by my bedside, and read to me in a sweet, low voice ; she was so very kind to me that, when I was better, I told her my sad tale. In leaving your father, I had taken my marriage certificate with me—not that I disbelieved his cruel words, but the sight of it seemed to save me from being in my own eyes the awful thing he had made me. This lady asked me to let her have it, and promised to show it to her brother, who was a barrister, and he would find out if it was really false. After some days she

returned it with the news that it was *perfectly legal*. Oh! Vivien, how I seized it for your sake.

“Some time before, this kind, good lady, whose name was Miss Spencer, had suggested my writing to my uncle for help. I could not do so, when I thought I was so terribly disgraced; but now that I knew I was really that bad man’s wife, I wrote a long letter, telling him all I had suffered, of my husband’s cruelty and your birth; and I added that I was then lying in a workhouse bed, penniless and ill.

“I waited a long time for an answer. At last it came—short, cold, and unsympathetic. He told me my conduct had forfeited all claim on his affection. He enclosed an English bank-note for £50, and said it was all I could ever expect from him. I could have prayed to die, I was so

humiliated, hopeless, and wretched ; but the sight of you, my helpless baby, told me I had something still to live for.

“ My kind friend, too, tried hard to comfort me, and, when I was well enough to be moved from the workhouse, took me home to her own lodgings. I found she was not rich, this kind, good woman, and so I hated being a burden to her. At my urged request she procured me an engagement as French governess at a ladies’ school, some little distance from our home.

“ I was very happy, Vivien, in those little London lodgings. Every morning I went to my work ; and often, tired and weary, I would hurry home, so happy, darling, to hold you in my arms again. For four years we lived so—you, I, and this kind Miss Spencer. When I returned in the evening, I used to look up to the window,

sure of seeing your dear little face watching for me, my boy ; and the hope of seeing you upheld me all day, and prevented my growing weary of life. It seems to me *now*, in my misery, that the happy evenings we three enjoyed must have been all a bright dream. I would work at a little dress for you, or perhaps would sit idly, with you in my arms, while Miss Spencer read some entertaining book out loud, or talked in her gentle, loving voice of how she had spent the day ; and sometimes we would work hard, making warm garments for the sick and poor, and you would try to spell little childish tales to us ; or I would teach you French words, and pay you in kisses for being so quick ; and then we would all kneel down together, and pray for God's protection during the night. But at last an end came to this happy,

quiet life. Miss Spencer got ill from sitting too long in a close room, reading to some lonely, dying pauper. She was very, very ill, and I gave up my employment to take care of her. She died, darling—so peacefully, that it seemed sinful to wish her back again; but, my boy, we wept very bitterly as we took our last look at the gentle, faded face that had made earth so happy for us.

“She left all her money to me. It proved very little—only £200. She had lived on an annuity, and must have saved that from it. It was a great boon to me, for my place at the school was filled; and we should have starved long ago but for her kind thought. We removed to cheaper lodgings, Vivien; and though I tried hard to get employment, I could not obtain any. I spent a great deal of money going to

agencies and answering advertisements for governesses, but I could get no daily occupation ; and as for going away for good, I could not leave you, my darling. And so by degrees our money dwindled away, and we removed from cheaper to cheaper lodgings ; and *now*, baby, I am writing in a cold, bare attic. We have had little to eat to-day, and I am sure, my darling, you are very hungry, though you don't complain. Oh ! my boy, how will it end ? May our bitter curse rest on your father ! I am afraid, child, in this rich city we shall die of starvation. I cannot write any more. Oh ! the pain of seeing your beauty fade, and your little face grow pinched and thin !

“ My poverty has been so insulted, Vivien, as starving and cold we have wandered about ; and now we must leave even the shelter of this miserable garret, in

a close back street. The landlady has just said we must go if I cannot pay ; and oh ! my baby, *how* can I pay ? I have not even a penny to buy food with !

“ I put down my pen yesterday, broken-hearted and sad ; you said, ‘ Can’t we pray, mother ? ’ And so we prayed, Vivien ; and oh ! child, the Lord has answered our prayer ; has he not ? I went out, wandering aimlessly, anywhere, to get some fresh air ; for I felt stifled and ill. We stood on Westminster Bridge. The stars were shining on the water. It looked so calm and peaceful ; and, baby, a wild, wicked desire to end all and be at rest came over me ; the dark, gleaming water seemed to fascinate me. I shudder to remember how I felt, when you slipped your little hand in mine, and said, ‘ Oh ! mother, can’t we go home ?—it is so cold ! ’ I was saved ; the

wicked feeling left me, and I turned to go home. A man almost reeled against us; he was young, well dressed, and evidently intoxicated. 'Here's a sovereign for a kiss, my dear,' he said, holding one so loosely in his fingers that it rolled to my feet. I shrank away from him, and, with a coarse laugh, he walked on. I stood still for some moments, and the lamp-light flickering on the sovereign, I stooped and picked it up.

'Oh! darling, I was so poor, that it seemed wealth to me. It has paid our rent; it has fed us. And now, my boy, I am going to seek help from one who once freely offered it; she is a widow, and childless; and if, as I hope, she will adopt you, I—— Ah! well, I hardly know yet what I am going to do; but I could die happily if I knew you were provided for.

"But, Vivien, if this letter falls into your

hands when I am dead, remember I charge you solemnly, when you find your father, to accept no love from him. That you two *will* meet I feel convinced, and *he* will love you, Vivien; but, child, from your birth I dedicated you to this end—to be my avenger! Whatever happens, always remember that *you are my vengeance*. They say the dying often see into the future, and I *know*, my child, that in the coming years you will not prove false to your mother's trust.

“I kiss you again and again, my little son, but these kisses are for your manhood, Vivien. Think kindly, sometimes, darling, of

“Your poor, wronged mother,

“ISABELLE STANLEY.”

Vivien's face was very pale as he finished reading his dead mother's letter; but there

were no tears now in the dark sullen eyes ; he seemed to have aged years in the last short hour. Surely, as he stood up, the strong determined shadow deepening on his face, it looked no mean champion that dead woman had left to avenge her. He took up his father's portrait. The deeply-set grey eyes, the well-shaped aquiline features, the proud, firmly-closed mouth, unshaded by the heavy moustache that covered it in after-life, brought no atom of recollection to Vivien's mind. Although as a child the resemblance had struck him, now memory never once pointed to Lord Clowden Strafford. He stood looking at it, trying to stamp the haughty patrician face for ever on his mind ; trying to see by this one clue what manner of man he could have been who had taken his poor girl-mother from her home, tired of her, and driven her out

into the cold, pitiless world, to suffer such sorrow, such hardships, as made his heart burn only to read of!

It seemed hard to connect that laughing, beautiful girl-face with the tearful trembling lines her weary hand had penned; that pitiful relic of her sweet, bright youth; of her fond love, her bitter sorrow, and crushing poverty, and through it all the never-fading tenderness for himself. All the cruel weight of misery had never chilled *that!*

“Is there a just God in heaven, and such a monster goes unpunished?” thought the young man; “or is he left for *me?*”

And there came a look into Vivien Stanley’s face, so full of ominous, black-browed anger, that a devil might have rejoiced to see it.



CHAPTER IX.



ORD CLOWDEN had few men friends. He was too overbearing, too thoroughly selfish, to get on well with his own sex ; so, even had he wished it to be otherwise, his life would have been very lonely after he left Marion. Of course, I mean lonely in the truest sense. We may mix with a large crowd, and yet, for want of that subtle charm called *sympathy*, feel utterly alone ; a heart weariness which is more depressing in companionship than in real solitude. He was a very proud man, and would have shrunk with acute pain from being questioned in any way about

his home affairs ; so he carefully avoided all the men he knew, knowing that his separation from his wife was food for scandal ; and he had no wish to give the curious any chance of seeing how bitterly he felt this sorrow.

Clowden was one of those men who must have some one to love, to make their existence complete. He had none of those talents or vices that other men find excitement and pleasure in. "Play" had never possessed any charm for him. He had tried it before, and he tried it again, now in his great *ennui* ; but whether he lost or gained, the demon of weariness claimed him for its own. He had seen grown men watching with childish agony the turn of a card or the rattle of the dice-box, and he had despised, while he had wondered at, the mad infatuation that would lead sen-

sible, clear-brained men, step by step, down the dark road of poverty, shame and dishonour, the gambler treads.

He had frequented the lowest gambling hells in Germany, with the Epicurean spirit that would make all things subservient to its amusement, only to watch the ragged, haggard outcasts who would have laid their very souls a stake in the insatiate lust of gain. He would watch them with the critical eye of an artist, noticing the sanguine hope, hollow-eyed despair, or the wild, excited glitter of success ; experiencing a quiet, half romantic feeling, more of interest than pity. Once, with a newly-awakened compassion, he remonstrated with a mere youth he found in one of these dens.

“Give up ‘play’ !” cried the young man ;
“why, then I should have nothing left to live for.”

All the cynic in Clowden's soul was roused.

"If it makes life pleasant I *envy* you," he said ; and from the bottom of his heart he meant it. The man was so far lost that he would have been a gambler, a drunkard, a *roué*—*anything*, could either have repaid him with happiness.

Flirting even possessed no charm for him now : not that he did not work much mischief with his handsome face, and haughty sneering manner that had all the charm of novelty, and won many a heart satiated with flattery and homage ; but it was done heartlessly, without tenderness, or even interest. He knew his advantages, and even when he pushed them to the utmost he never softened ; the rich treasure of a true woman's love this man's heart had become too hardened to appreciate, and yet, when

no eye could note his weakness, he often wept tears of agony for that pure woman whose love he had lost. Often home memories would come yearningly back, and his present life would seem unbearable. If Marion had been an ordinary woman, if he had thoroughly understood her, he would have gone back and tried to make this wretched quarrel up; but, he argued, if she had been so constant in her calmness, might she not be equally so in her anger? And so pride stepped in, and prevented Clowden returning to his wife. But pride could not stifle the weary heartache that *would* be heard, goading him, and rousing all the rebellious devil of his nature. His life seemed one long weariness, and he was a man of strong passion and fervid impulse—a man who, had he been poor and obliged to work, would have held his own and made

his way in the world ; even his wealth aided the Nemesis that pursued him.

Had he cared for hunting or shooting, there were many houses open to him, men who had known his father and would have welcomed Clowden eagerly ; but in his pride he could not visit without Marion. He was no betting man ; he hated Newmarket, and had never been to Tattersall's since his boyhood. As for the Derby, it had been just tolerable with a pretty woman by his side, giving *piquancy* to the winning colours by glove betting and other feminine nonsense, but *now*, the pitiless truth must be told, Clowden was *blasé*.

That word seems to me so full of pain, implying a weariness so awful, so intense, that the most acute agony would be Heaven to it ; a world full of God-given pleasure and beauty, but a heart *dead* to all its per-

fection—a heart in its lethargy even so full of passion, so keen-sighted to its miserable cynicism, as to be like a living soul chained to a corpse !

“If I had Vivien with me,” he often thought, “how different it would be !” And he pictured his bright boyhood—that boyhood he had never cheered—and noble manhood. “How I should have loved him—my son, my eldest son ! To have kept that fresh young life near me, almost losing my identity in his, so to have cast off this utter weariness ! Does he ever think of his unknown father, I wonder ?—and *how* does he think of him ? Oh ! Isabelle, surely *this* alone is retribution—the unavailing love I bear *our* son !”

He had no taste for fine art, or even appreciation for Nature’s beauty. He passed the most lovely of tropical scenery unmoved ;

he hurried away from the gleaming glaciers and snow-clad mountains. He tried the New World; visited the Niagara. "It is very wonderful," he said, "that mighty, foaming, falling water! but——" It failed to amuse him, that was all; that was the only fault he found with everything. He was so wrapped in the egotism of his own sorrow that he allowed nothing to take him out of himself for a moment.

He travelled restlessly, seeking pleasure, and finding only satiety. Often he would go away without word or sign, and then telegraph to his valet to follow him; so the man was always prepared for any sudden whim of his master's. Thus it was that he failed to receive a letter Lady Evelylin wrote till months after it was due.

Carrie told him her anxiety about Marion, whom they knew now was sinking rapidly.

She begged him to return *at once*, if he wished to see her before her death ; and she added that her sister knew nothing of her having written. Clowden had opened the letter with a yawn, but he started up from reading it, full of life and energy. His Marion ill ! perhaps *dead* by now ! Should he lose her really ? Oh, God ! what a bitter ending to all this misery !

He travelled night and day, by steam and rail, by water and land, cursing each trifling delay in agony of spirit, till at last, tired and anxious, he arrived late one afternoon at Doolington Hall. He asked for Lady Evylin, but he did not send up his name ; so it was with a very perplexed face Carrie received him. She did not recognise that travel-stained, bearded man as the handsome, aristocratic Lord Clowden Strafford.

“How is Marion?” he asked, eagerly. “I only got your letter a few days back, and I have travelled night and day.”

Carrie knew him now. “Marion is a little better; we thought she was going, when I wrote,” she answered, almost apologetically.

“God bless you for writing,” he cried, pressing her hand. “Do you think she would see me?”

“I will ask her,” she said, turning to leave the room, but Clowden followed her; if he had to stand outside the door, he would see how this wife he had left for fourteen long years received the news that he had returned.

Carrie opened the door of Marion’s room, and Clowden, obeying a sudden impulse, motioned her back and entered, softly and alone.

His wife was seated by the fire, lying back in a low arm-chair, the tawny wealth of loosely-coiled hair contrasting with the almost unnaturally delicate bloom of her face ; Marion Strafford was still a fair woman to look upon, but the weary, sorrowing shadow stamped on the soft profile smote him, and his heart went out in the yearning cry—

“ Marion ! ”

She started, half rising, resting her hand on the chair ; a thousand emotions of surprise, fear, hope, and oh ! Heaven bless the word, *joy*, struggling for mastery in her changing face. Two quick steps to her side, he took her to his arms, and she laid her head on his broad breast, closing her eyes in the utter weariness of great joy, thanking God in her heart for this answered prayer.

He smoothed back the ruddy hair, and pressed his lips on her fair brow in one long fervent kiss.

“My Marion, my wife!”

They sat down side by side, he still holding her closely to him, that fragile, wasted shadow of the Marion he had left.

“Oh, Clowden! I have missed you so,” she whispered.

“And I have been so weary, Marion.”

She looked up at him, the dark handsome face, so full of yearning tenderness; but there were lines, the sad print of dissipation and sin, that had not been there when she last saw him. Bad as he was when she sent him from her, he had returned ten times more sinful. She realised this, blaming herself; she could not despise him for it, as in her purity she might once

have done, those long weary years had taught her charity. She put up her hand to his face as though to smooth them away, that weak white hand that might have led him, had she not despised its strength.

“Oh ! forgive me, Clowden ?”

His arms tightened in their tender hold.

“I can think of nothing *now*, but the pleasure of holding you in my arms again.”

It was true, the lonely past was only a bitter dream, looking at that soft *mignonne* face Time had dealt so tenderly with—smoothing the tawny luxuriant hair, and realising what a perfect rest his strong arm was to the weary woman.

“You have been very ill, my own ?” he said.


She smiled at him, a sweet, patient smile.

“They said it was consumption, but I knew it was only my heart-ache; I feel better with you by me, Clowden. When you came in, I was dreaming of that summer we spent at Florence; and I thought I saw you coming towards me with D’Arcy in your arms; don’t you remember, Clowden, it was my birthday, and you put your gift in D’Arcy’s hand for me to take?”

A tremor shook his frame, the memory of that beautiful past cut him to the heart like a knife.

“Don’t talk of the past, my darling, the future still is ours; I must take you to Florence and make you quite well again. How is D’Arcy?” he added, abruptly.

“Poor D’Arcy!” she said, tenderly, “he has had to walk on crutches since that dreadful day; but he is so gentle and good,



and he seems very happy, happier than I thought he would have been after Vivien went."

"And Vivien, what of him?" asked Clowden.

"He is in India with his regiment. Tell me something about yourself, Clowden; where have you been all these years?"

"Travelling about, my darling, miserable and lonely, yearning to hold your little hand again."

"And you will never leave me now, Clowden?"

"Leave you! Oh! God, no!"

She wound her white arm round his neck, drawing that lined, bearded face down to a level with her own, kissed him very tenderly; and in that kiss he felt that her heart was more wholly, truly his than when she plighted her life to him at God's altar.



CHAPTER X.



LOWDEN took Marion to Florence in the early spring ; they would have started at once after their happy reunion, but they feared the fogs that are so prevalent there in the winter might have an injurious effect on Marion's cough. It was only a cough, they tried hard to persuade themselves, in spite of the doctor's warning. A very sad cough it was, too, at times taxing the invalid's feeble strength to the utmost ; but established in a pretty, statue-adorned square, with the mild air blowing pure and perfumed from the Arno, she began to pick up wonderfully, and soon she

could take little happy walks, leaning on Clowden's strong arm, through this city of palaces, bridges, and churches; this beautiful woody valley, encircled by its eternal guards, the Apennines; this spot where the cowed monk Dante dreamt, and Petrarch sojourned, and Michael Angelo daily trod! This cradle of art, surpassing the Vatican even in its collection of paintings, possessing the *chef-d'œuvre* of statuary—the famous “Venus de Medici,” that lasting tribute of Athenian art.

They would slowly pace the handsome quays, charmed by rich views of the river Florence, or through the Botanical and Boboli Gardens. They would spend hours in the Pitti and Corsini palaces, enchanted by Guido's heads, or the soft, rich beauty so peculiar to landscapes of the Italian school; always together, enjoying the subtle

perfect sympathy that makes the most barren waste a Heaven. Years after, Clowden visited those very galleries, but he missed the sweet, low voice so tremulous in its eager appreciation of all this beauty; missed the brightening glances of those dear eyes; missed the light weight needing his support; and he sadly owned that those wanderings through the sacred chambers of art had owned their pleasure to that one sweet being his heart so fondly cherished. Those months at Florence had all the charm of a second honeymoon, for though D'Arcy and his tutor were with them, they rarely interrupted the constant companionship that had become so inexpressibly dear to Clowden.

It pained him to see his poor crippled son deprived of manhood's glory—the power of its strength; but the boy himself seemed

to feel it very little ; he had become so used to see others pass him by free-limbed and athletic ; so used to be a spectator, not an actor, in life's moving panorama ; and the sunshine of a happy, loving disposition, lit up his heart, allowing no shadow to cover the demon Envy. The soft, fair, aristocratic face was very winning, with its pliable, sensitive mouth, and pleasant blue eyes ; so ready with its almost womanly smile, flushing like a school girl at the slightest emotion. But Clowden would often watch him anxiously, the clear beauty of his complexion seemed unnatural, and he feared that he too had inherited that fatal disease that must sooner or later take Marion from him.

D'Arcy and Vivien kept up a pretty fair correspondence, and as the boy was generally full of his friend's letters for at least a week

after they arrived, Clowden heard all the news without evincing any curiosity beyond a kind interest in D'Arcy's pleasure. They were very pleasant epistles, full of vivid descriptions of Indian life, amusing anecdotes, and tender home memories; but it seemed to Clowden that the gaiety was only assumed, and he thought he could trace a vein of sadness running through all the wit and fun that amused D'Arcy so. It pained and perplexed him. "What had Vivien to be unhappy about?" he would ask himself. "He was young and very handsome, established in a noble profession, and well-to-do, in a pecuniary sense.

Of that letter from the dead Clowden knew nothing, or the dark cloud it threw over the bright young life.

"He is a good young fellow," Clowden would say to himself, after reading these

letters, "if he were not, he could not write such fresh, pure thoughts. There is none of that horrible affectation of age in Vivien's letters that cursed my youth and hardened my heart from folly to sin. What was *I*, at his age, a cynic at heart, a man of the world, a beardless *roué*, the husband of a discarded, wronged wife, the father of an unknown, unowned son!"

Clowden had always been a man who "knew the right, and yet the wrong pursued;" he could never plead ignorance in treading the downward path of sin. He had erred always in open defiance of his own conscience, and that conscience had never completely hardened even in the most evil companionship, but now, dwelling in the daily influence of his wife's gentle purity, his former life seemed very horrible by comparison, and he felt it would be inexpressible

agony to see Vivien's noble manhood disfigured by such sins as had blackened his own life.

* * * * *

"I think those pillars round the altar spoil the effect, don't you, Julie?"

Clowden and Marion were just leaving the Cathedral when they heard these words spoken by an unmistakably English voice, and turning round he recognised Colonel Bellingham, a man he had once been very intimate with, but whom he had not seen for many years; he was accompanied by a very beautiful young lady, whom he introduced as his daughter.

"My little girl would not let me rest till I brought her to Florence; I had no idea you were here, Lord Clowden," he said.

He was a portly, pleasant-faced man, with the soul of a gourmand, and a heart that

was devotion itself to this one fair child fate had blessed him with.

Perhaps I had better describe Miss Bellingham to you. I shall have to do so sooner or later ; and yet I shrink from the task, not because it is an irksome one, but because, stamped on my heart as her beauty is, I fear I shall never do her justice, never give you a full idea of the winning, dangerously witching face this woman possessed. I saw her a few days back, still superb in her insolent beauty, and my heart woke again with the passionate, yearning love of that summer—well, I wont say how many years ago—when she fooled me.

Picture to yourself a perfectly oval face, nut-brown hair growing low on the broad white brow ; eyebrows and eyes of the same soft shade, the former arched and strongly marked, the latter long, half-veiled, and

almond-shaped, generally full of sleepy defiance, but when she was excited or amused, dilating and flashing a sudden tawny light ; the nose rather large, but so slender and perfectly proportioned, that no one could wish it smaller ; the mouth would have been slightly coarse in any other face, but here it was only voluptuous in its full ripe beauty, parting, when she smiled, over the most lovely set of teeth I have ever seen, small, perfect in shape, and giving one an idea of transparency in their dazzling whiteness. But Miss Bellingham's chief beauty was the colour of her skin, the blue veins shadowing its snowy surface like azure tracings on polished ivory. A fresh, clear carmine glowed in her cheeks, deepening to vermilion in the smooth, full lips. She was not tall, this fair Julie, reaching that happy medium height when perfect sym-

metry and grace best blend. As she stood there, clad in the deepest mourning, for her mother had died but six months back, she looked lovely as a vision ; but, although I have thus briefly described her, I cannot give you the changing, witching beauty of expression that made Julie Bellingham at once a fascinating and a dangerous woman.

“Do you like Florence?” Marion asked.

The girl’s eyes lit up ; no one seeing her—fresh, natural, almost gushing—would have guessed how little of the bloom of youth lingered on her heart.

“Oh ! it is beautiful,” she said. “We have just been up the Campanile, and I have not yet recovered from the trance of delight that view produced ; the pretty river winding through the city, the vine-covered hills, and then those dear little white cottages perched on the Apennines !”

"Why, Julie, you are developing quite a talent for description," laughed her father.

Julie's full lips pouted. "That is just like you, papa. He can never appreciate anything," she continued, turning to her new friends; "the other day, when I was worshipping Raphael's genius, he told me in the most heartless manner that Raphael was a very bad man; how can I look at those heavenly faces again and forget that the artist was not an angel?"

"Would *that* make any difference?" Clowden asked. "If his Satanic Majesty himself had painted a good picture, I rather fancy that the artist's character would add to the interest."

"Julie was so wild with me," laughed the Colonel, "because, when we were in the Vatican, I reminded her it was dinner-time."

“Who could think of *dinner* while looking at Michael Angelo’s ‘Last Judgment?’ It was not in the Vatican, but in the Sistine Chapel you made that greedy remark, you dear old hungry papa,” said Julie, losing her pout in a lovely smile.

“I can never remember names,” he said, helplessly; “but, *àpropos* of dinner, I have had nothing fit to eat since we left Paris. I am positively dreading feeding time at the hotel.”

Clowden looked at Marion, and she immediately invited them to dinner; Clowden adding, with a smile, “We have an excellent French cook, so I can promise you at least an omelette.”



CHAPTER XI.



COLONEL BELLINGHAM was a younger son; his brother, Sir Hugh, inheriting the fine old park and Gothic mansion where first he opened his brown eyes on this world's sunlight. But he was not a poor man; on his mother's side he became possessed of a handsome English homestead and a very fair fortune. Early in life he had bought himself a commission in the Dragoon Guards, and with a true soldier's zeal had worked honestly up to his present rank. While serving in India he had married a beautiful Spanish woman named Jaunita, or "Yaunita," as she called

herself. They had lived very happily together till her death, and then the widower's whole heart became devoted to his only child—the fair Julie, whose pretty French name her father had a knack of saying very softly.

They were a very merry party at dinner that evening. The Colonel told some very good home stories, and no one but Julie knew how repetition had improved them. At last, having exhausted all his conversational store, he fell back on his old amusement—teasing Julie.

“This romantic child,” he said, “made me take her to see the ruins of the Colosseum by moonlight. I was shivering with cold, but I don't know how long Julie would have sat there ; and at last she said to me, with tears in her eyes, ‘I could stay here till I became a poet.’”

The Colonel laughed his great hearty

English laugh; but Julie grew so very red, that Clowden took her part, saying gravely—

“Scenery has great power in rousing all our better feelings; and romance is nothing but appreciation roused and beautified. You know we are indebted to the shady groves of Vallombrosa for Milton’s immortal verse.”

Like all passionate, intense natures, Julie was very sensitive to ridicule, and the half-veiled eyes thanked him warmly. Clowden looked upon her simply as a romantic child; had any voice whispered to him that that woman held a future, black for himself and those he loved, he would have laughed the warning to scorn.

Later in the evening Miss Bellingham sang to them. As she rose from the piano she was struck by the shy sympathy of

D'Arcy's brightening blue eyes. All the boy's gentle, refined spirit had shrank from the Colonel's jests; for D'Arcy was very romantic, though he had never dared to utter his cherished thoughts even to his parents, who were perhaps the last people on earth to have sneered at them; and his whole heart woke in sympathy for Julie. He had been drinking in the clear rich voice till it woke an answering dreamy melody in his own heart, and he fairly started when she sat down on the sofa by his side.

The boy, with his soft, sweet face and gentle manner, insensibly interested her; and this finished coquette, this belle of two seasons, fancied it would be rather a pastime to accept the homage she saw already sparkling in his clear blue eyes. Julie looked upon men's hearts as toys to be played with and broken, according to her

royal will. What did she care if her victims carried a dead heart to his grave, a heart that she herself had crushed; it could not spoil the glory of a new triumph, or dull the splendour of her future conquests. She could shake the dust of a strong man's agony from off her dainty feet, and go on her road rejoicing.

She found D'Arcy very easy to manage; how could it have been otherwise? He was a boy on whose awakening soul was just dawning the sweet, shy romance of a pure heart's first love. She was a woman steeped in coquetry, and perfected by at least a dozen flirtations, in Cupid's lore.

I said love was already dawning on D'Arcy's heart, and yet he had never seen Julie before that evening; but a fig for the love that grows by degrees. Love at first sight was, and always is, the sweetest,

brightest draught of sentiment. What can slowly-warmed respect have to compare with passion, that wakes the heart to new life, like strong wine intoxicating every sense ; filling the whole soul with burning poetry, that no earthly word could ever express ; rousing our appreciation of the beauty round us ; and crowning our lives with strange glad wonder ?

When they parted that evening D'Arcy was a new being. Those long sleepy eyes, flashing like the topaz brilliancy of summer lightning, haunted his very dreams.

All that summer he abode under the spell, the witching sorcery of this fair flirt. She had a clever way of sympathising with one's pet fancies, that was very winning. D'Arcy's brain was full of the Greek poets, steeped in Latin verse and old-world love stories ; and Julie, though no classical

scholar, found it very pleasant and very novel, to travel through the wonderful land of fancy with this boy, who had all the appreciation of an artist's soul, and the glowing language of a poet. She found it rather dangerous too. Slowly this butterfly began to realise that the fire she had lit to burn another's heart was already beginning to scorch her own ; and when the time came for them to part she felt strangely inclined to be *really* romantic.

She had stayed at Florence as long as possible, giving up altogether her idea of going on to Genoa. Her father had made no objection, only stipulating that they should return to England before the hunting season, for a constant devotee of Artemis was old Colonel Bellingham. She took with her all D'Arcy's love—the fresh, strong, true love of a boy—and she left with

him a long soft brown curl, the memory of that farewell kiss, and a whispered promise more binding in its sweet solemnity than many proudly-uttered vows.

As the autumn approached, Marion's cough returned, and she grew so sadly weak that Clowden became very anxious about her. He wished her to leave Florence; but as she did not like the idea of moving, and was really too weak to bear the journey, they put off going from week to week.

The disease was so treacherous, sometimes she would seem full of health and spirits, and the next day perhaps perfectly prostrate with weakness; but she always found in Clowden the most gentle of nurses and the kindest of companions. His voice was always lowered to its softest key when he spoke to her, and often she would find him watching her with a strangely tender look in his eyes that had

never been there in the old times: inexpressibly dear to his world-weary heart was this fair woman, whose life hung on a thread.

One Sunday afternoon Marion was lying on a sofa in her *boudoir*. Clowden had been reading to her, and now he stood by the window looking on the gay crowd of pedestrians; but his thoughts were far away, they were wandering backwards many years on the road of time, and, strangely enough, Lucy Dashwood mixed with his musings. He could see the long room at Doolington Hall, filled with the happy-faced guests at the county ball, and half hidden by the fernery in a far-off corner a little sunny-haired damsel. He remembered how he had turned from her to admire Marion in all the pride of her graceful girlish loveliness: and then his thoughts

wandered on, and he forgot Lucy in the tender anxiety for that dear wife that always haunted him now. He turned towards her; she was awake and watching him, so he went to her side.

“What were you thinking of, Clowden, you looked so grave?”

“I don’t know what brought it to my mind, Marie, but I was thinking of that ball at Doolington Hall just before our marriage.”

“Dear old Doolington,” she said, “I should like to see it again before I die.”

“So you will, my darling, many many times, I hope,” he said, sitting down by her side, and drawing her into his arms.

“I am so tired, Clowden, but I would rather rest here a little longer, if God will let me. Why do you tremble, darling? The doctors say I may live years yet, you

know. I have been so happy all this year. Those fourteen years that you were away seem nothing; they have completely vanished from my memory, and I feel only to have lived these last few months. You have been very good to me, my husband—— What, Clowden, can it be possible!" for the tears were falling on her white hand.

"Oh! my darling, I could not lose you; you *must* live."

The fragile burden rested so lightly on his strong, trembling arm; the sweet face, soft as the waxen cast of some pure saint, looked scarcely life-like; and the man bowed his head over her in silent agony, realising the cold chill of this unnatural beauty, that was the beauty of the grave.

"I wish I was at Doolington," she said, after a long pause. "I don't like these

noisy Sundays ; it was always so quiet there, and I want Carrie to talk to me. I used to think myself such a good woman, but I am sure now that I never was that."

"You were always too good for me," Clowden said, turning the loose rings round and round her thin soft fingers. "I have never known another woman so near my ideas of an angel."

"How thin my hands are, Clowden ! Once those rings were quite tight ; they are all your gifts. You must have me buried with them on. I shall tie them on with cotton to-morrow, so that they can't slip off. I wish I could see Carrie. It does not seem a bit like Sunday ; she always made me feel so good."

Long afterwards, Clowden remembered the icy chill that crept over him when

Marion talked like this—it was so unlike her ; there was a peevishness in her manner to-day that had never been there before.

“ Say something, Clowden,” she continued ; “ something that Carrie would say if she were here. You will tell her how I wanted her,—and papa. You will give them my love ? ”

“ Oh ! Marion, don’t talk so, my darling ; you are breaking my heart ! ”

“ Say something that Carrie would say,” she repeated.

“ Something that Carrie would say, my own ? How do I know what she would say ? ”

“ Something from the Bible—I forget—some text—you surely know one, Clowden ? ” And the tearful eyes were full of piteous pleading.

Some text ! The whole man’s hardened

soul woke in yearning agony. Some text from the Bible he had never opened for twenty years! In vain he searched his memory; the pleading of those anxious upturned eyes cut him to the soul, and there was an unspoken prayer for help in his atheist heart when back to his mind flashed that beautiful promise, heard without thought, without care, in the little village church that Sunday when his guilty soul first knew the secret of Lucy's love. Ah! Mathew Palmer, you little thought perhaps, when you cast that bread upon the waters, that it would serve a sinner in his need, and speed a parting soul on its way to God!

Slowly and reverently Clowden repeated the beautiful words: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow,

nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain, for all former things have passed away."

She put her head down on his shoulder, as a weary child might have done, closing her eyes. He thought she was sleeping, and held her so in silence; but, when he bent down gently to kiss her brow, it was icy cold—Marion was dead. There had come a stranger into that room, very softly, beckoning her away; and Clowden was alone!





CHAPTER XII.



WHAT a strange power that passion called love has ! Fettering the heart, blinding the intellect ; holding us in a bondage more subtle, more deep, than the mighty power of our own will. Over all the other passions we have some control ; but this magic influence, Love, generally begins by utterly subduing our will, by bending and breaking it, till it becomes part and parcel of our tyrant. So Mathew Palmer found it ; with all his clear common sense, with all his mental ability, he was weak as a child on one subject—his love for little Lucy. He knew that her heart

could never be his, that it had been laid long ago, a willing sacrifice, on an unworthy shrine; he knew, gauging her love by the constancy of his own, that, try as she would, she could never efface the deep sorrowing print of the love of her girlhood. He pitied her for this, and loved her with a deeper yearning, knowing how she needed love, the love that he felt could never be hers.

There were many girls, fairer and younger than Lucy, who would willingly have been mistress of the vicarage; girls who were quite enthusiastic about the vicar; but though Mathew could admire their blooming faces and amiable manners, his heart always turned from them with strange sad longing to little blue-eyed Lucy. There was a chord, full of tender harmony, that only she could touch; only

she, all unconsciously, could strike the keynote that would have perfected his life. He kept away from her, trying to root this love from his heart; but he heard of her often—words of loving praise from Jack and his wife, who visited Boulogne as often as the captain could obtain leave. They were precious morsels of news to him, hungering as he did for the music of his darling's name.

Little Lucy, in her foreign home, was learning the divine, beautiful lesson it had cost her so many years of sorrow to understand; slowly from the hopelessness of her earthly love she was beginning to rest on that love that knows no changing—on the mighty saving love of eternity. The chastening sorrow had come to her like a tyrant master, but it abode with her a gentle holy influence. Perhaps a nature

like Lucy's—weak, fond, and impulsive—needed such discipline, who can tell? But however the lesson is taught, it matters little so long as we accomplish the object of our life—learning it.

It had been weary work to Lucy. There had been times when her heart had woke full of mad passionate love; when she had felt that death even would be preferable to this heart desolation; when it had seemed as though she could walk the whole length and breadth of the world only to look on Clowden again, to die at his feet, even though he passed her by unseen. When she had looked back with strange sad wonder to those times when she had met him daily, and yet had not been intoxicated with joy; when she had touched his hand and heard him speak, and yet chilled her mighty love into perfect decorum.

What power had saved her *then*, only to let loose now the demons of unavailing love, to tear up the broken ground of her poor aching heart?

But as years rolled on in the cloister influence of this God-fearing home, Lucy's weary heart gradually became filled with that perfect peace that no breath of earthly passion, no worldly sorrow, could ever disturb. She exchanged the miserable weed of this mortal garden for the beautiful, perfect flower of eternity.

Lucy gave Mrs. Gordon all a daughter's love and care, sorrowing for her very bitterly when she died. She had possessed ample means, so she left Lucy above the need of seeking employment. Captain Jack could not bear the idea of selling the house his father had built, so he asked Lucy to live in it; and whenever they could he and

Mary paid her a visit, bringing with them their two little daughters; and the youngest was her godchild—Lucy.

When Mathew heard of Mrs. Gordon's death, and that Lucy was living alone, a sweet new hope brightened his heart. Might she not now, after all these weary years, consent to be his wife? He had loved her so long that surely she was his by right, to fill the lonely, empty vicarage with the sunshine of her presence.

He could not put the hope from him; it grew stronger day by day; and he found himself yearning more and more for her companionship.

"How happy we might be," he would say to himself, "if Lucy would only forget that first love; and I would be content with so little affection from *her*."

So one morning, finding himself in pos-

session of a perfectly free day, he crossed the Channel, and presented himself at Myrtle House. Long afterwards the bright, home-like, bay-windowed parlour, with the fair gentle little woman bending over her work—a dainty mixture of gay wool—came back to him, such a contrast to his sombre book-lined rooms! They talked on many subjects, till at last Mathew came to the point, clumsily, as a man always does when he wishes to be natural and feels uneasy.

“I have loved you for many years, Lucy. Will you be my wife?”

“Why, Mathew,” she said, smiling, “I am a confirmed old maid now!” and went on quietly with her work.

“I think we should be happy,” he pleaded. “I would do all in my power to make you so.”

She said nothing, only bending her face

lower over the bright wool. All the pretty roundness and soft bloom was gone now, but it was a sweet, womanly face—a face that many a good man might have loved and been proud to love.

“I am very lonely,” he continued. “I am always thinking of you, Lucy; and I could not resist the impulse to come and make one last appeal to your heart.”

Still no answer, only a quicker movement of the busy white hands.

“Wont you answer me, Lucy?” he said, bending forward and imprisoning one of them. “Do say, ‘Yes,’ darling.”

“I am afraid it must be ‘No,’ Mathew. I should not make you happy; I have no heart to give,” she said, gently, leaving her hand in his.

“But, my dearest, I don’t want your heart; I love you so, that I had rather

have your friendship than any other woman's love."

"No, Mathew," she said; "it would not be right to marry you when I don't love you."

"But you would love me, Lucy. I love you so much, that in time you would learn to like me a little. I would be your slave, darling; only give me time. Be my wife, and let me win your love afterwards; I could be so patient. My life is so empty and lonely, it is cruel of you to refuse."

"You think so now, Mathew; but you would find out your mistake afterwards, and wish we had never married."

"No, I should not," he said, quickly. "I would wait years for your love."

"You would soon tire of trying to make me love you as a wife ought, and"—her voice sunk to a whisper—"you would never succeed."

“Lucy, let me try.”

She looked at him—the honest, open face and kind brown eyes, piteous in their earnest pleading—and it seemed so hard to give him pain; but she was wiser than he, and saw more plainly the gulf between them. She knew how dead her heart was, and what a bitter mockery this marriage would be.

“Poor Mathew!” she said. And those soft blue eyes, that had long ago looked his heart away, were mistily compassionate through the rising teardrops. “Poor dear; kind friend, it can never be; try and love some one who is worthy of you, and forget the old woman you fancy you love.”

He threw himself back in the chair, almost impatiently. “You are cold and heartless, Lucy. You cannot understand such love as mine.”

“That is not kind of you, Mathew. You will be sorry afterwards for having spoken so harshly.”

“Forgive me,” he said, meekly. “I am such a stupid, blunt fellow; but if I could I would spend ten years of my life learning the fascinations of that villain you love.”

“Hush!” she said. “I do not love him in the way you talk of. If he were to come to me now, as you have, my answer would still be ‘No.’ When our heart is dead, we cannot give it new life, but its grave is hallowed for ever.”

“This is very hard for me, Lucy; that man has made my life lonely, and I never wronged him. Why could he not have left you alone, my poor little darling?”

He walked to the window and looked out, utterly unconscious of the prettily laid out lawn, of the bright flowers taunting his

heart's sorrow, unwilling that she should see his agony.

It was so hard to give her up, that little, gentle, faded woman. His heart held such a cherished picture of her darling childish beauty, when those calm blue eyes had been so full of saucy coquetry, and the little dimples had played like sunny elves on her rosy cheek, the soft glittering hair framing it all in golden waves.

When he turned round the room was empty; Lucy had slipped away to weep alone. So he went without seeing her again, trying to think it was better so. Went back to his lonely, loveless hearth, to his dreary path of earthly duty, striving earnestly not to feel very bitter against the man who had made his life so desolate.

"Poor little darling," he said to himself; "her heart was too pure and true for him

to have trifled with. How I would have loved her all these weary years—years when she has been so lonely. And this is what those men do, and think no harm of it; he broke my poor pet's heart, and robbed my life of happiness."

It seemed such a short time back since that merry blue-eyed child had danced into his heart like a golden sunbeam, filling his sober scholarly brain with the light of true, fond love, making life for the time one bright day-dream. The corner that sunbeam had warmed could never chill now, and it nursed the pale sweet flower of memory, that nestled there throwing its faint pure odour over the weary desert.



CHAPTER XIII.



APTAIN STANLEY stood by the open window, looking out on the sultry barrack-yard. He had stood there exactly in the same attitude for ten minutes or more, yet there was nothing to be seen save a few soldiers sitting on a stone bench in the shade, smoking and laughing at the antics of a droll little nigger boy, who was making grotesque grimaces for their amusement; the little, black, fun-provoking face was turned away from him, so it was evident he was not deriving any benefit from its distortions.

Standing there, the swaying white blinds

throwing a faint varying shadow over the clear-cut, almost delicate profile; the calm, firm mouth, half shaded by the dark, drooping moustache; the deep, broad chest, and the strong lithe limbs—it was astonishing how suggestive both face and figure were of the moral and physical strength that so distinguished him. Far and near, in the camp, in the barracks, by dear old English homely firesides, and in West-end drawing-rooms, there were tales told till men's blood rose with excitement and women's hearts warmed, of his heroism and bravery in the great mutiny so lately quelled.

Now all was calm and peaceful again: the horrible slaughter might never have been but for the many, many empty chairs and empty aching hearts that could never again see the fair land's beauty without cursing the treachery it had dealt. But

security was fast returning; there were balls and gaieties of every description—love, flirtation, and glad laughter; Paris fashions, and submissive native servants. All was the same as before the ugly blot came; all was the same, save *memory*.

There was a subdued thoughtful look on the Captain's bronzed face, and from out the still depth of those soft dark eyes gleamed a great yearning. He had stood thus since ten minutes back, when he first opened the letter he now held in his hand—a slender slip of paper, but bringing unexpected tidings; tidings that had come too late now, tidings that had better have come long years back.

That thin slip of paper came to tell him that his great-uncle Ferdinand De Chambray was dead, and that he, Captain Vivien Stanley, was heir to fifteen thousand a year.

He was thinking now of that dear dead woman whose life this gold might have saved, whose bright fair youth had wasted away in want of the bare "daily bread." It seemed so bitter to think of that hard old man misering his wealth, his useless hoards of gold, while *she* had wandered homeless and penniless, weary and heart-sore; and now, long years after, for him, her son, to own that heaped-up treasure, that had been dearer to the dead old miser than the living beautiful flesh and blood.

He took up his mother's miniature; he always carried it about him, that dear dead face, that had never had its living rival in Vivien's heart.

"Oh! mother, had this come earlier, how happy we might have been together!" And there was a world of agony in that yearning

cry, a deep piteous moan for the "might have been."

Those sweet smiling pomegranate-tinted lips; those soft half-veiled orient eyes; that long white throat, contrasting the ebon locks: could commonplace, world women ever touch Vivien's heart while he loved *that*; and its sweet memory of the mother he knew and loved so well, out of his childish recollection of her, and, more than all, for that piteous letter that had woven her sorrows through every fibre of his frame.

Even had this wealth come earlier; even had they been allowed to live together, this mother and son; even had all Vivien's "might have been" come to pass, still she would have carried a wounded, sad heart through life; but in his great love Vivien was selfish, and he felt it would have made his

life so full, so bright, so beautiful, to have loved and cherished that dear dead mother. He was capable of such deep, strong love, and his heart often cried out for the living object to lavish all this pent-up devotion upon, to make a diadem of his heart's wealth for. Fair women had loved Vivien, for his towering height, for his known valour, for the grave beauty of his proud Greek face; bright eyes had shyly tried to woo him; little white hands had mutely bade him stay; but he had passed them by. Even as that unknown father had blighted his mother's life, so he blighted Vivien's; for what love could ever brighten his life who lived for the dead? What living woman could he ask to share his heart with that dead woman who had left him the bitter heritage of revenge? His was no butterfly heart, that could flirt with many;

had he been free to do so, beginning life with a future of his own, he would have chosen his one fair flower, and life might have flowed on for this brave true man, like some rich old romance, like some minstrel's lay of a warrior's fame laced with a tender holy love.

He rapidly made his plans; he had served his country faithfully, but he lived for a mission more sacred to him than England's glory, that dead mother's charge—*to find his father!* Now that he was free from the burden of earning his daily bread, he could begin that search in earnest, travel the whole length and breadth of the land, till they stood face to face—the Traitor and the Avenger!

Vivien went straight to the little house in Park Lane on his return to England. Lady Evylin lived alone there now, for Sir

John had passed through the great dark gate that shuts out the living from the dead, and a new master reigned at Doolington Hall. But his memory was green in many an honest heart, and many a homely voice would grow tender as it spoke of the dear old Squire who was man to man with them all; but praise or blame could never touch him now, could never wake a human echo in the silent cold vault where they sadly laid him.

Carrie welcomed her boy with all a mother's love and pride—that bronzed, bearded soldier who had crept into her arms a tiny helpless child.

“You will stay with me now?” she said.

They had been holding happy, loving converse, side by side in the firelight, and her soft white fingers were twined tenderly

round that strong brown hand that had meted death so often in the Eastern slaughter.

"Not yet, dear mother ; not till my work is finished. Then I will devote my life to you."

"You will marry, Vivien, and bring your wife sometimes to see me?"

There was a pained anxiety shining through the smile on the delicate white face ; the pain that was always in her heart when she thought of another stealing Vivien's love from her ; a pain that she herself never recognised as jealousy.

"I shall never marry," he said, simply.

"I wish you would accept Colonel Bellingham's invitation," Carrie said, after a short pause. "I feel quite uneasy about D'Arcy ; he writes so seldom, and there is nothing definite about his engagement. I

.

sometimes fancy Miss Bellingham is only playing with him."

"I heard a great deal about her in India," Vivien said, with a slight frown. "The men all called her '*Julie*,' and poor Leroy, that boy she jilted when his uncle disinherited him, went to the dogs as soon as he landed. Have you seen her, mother?"

"Never; but she must be a very beautiful as well as a very wicked flirt, from all I have heard. You must take care of your heart, Vivien."

A faint smile crept over his face. That miniature he wore next his heart rose so life-like before him; could its beauty ever have a living rival!

There was a long pause, and the fire-light flickered on the sweet white face, softening all the lines and shadows time

.

had left on its calm beauty, and on the bronzed thoughtful face, in all the pride of its perfect manhood. They said no word, but sat hand in hand, thinking: he of the past, and its bitter burden; she of the future, when this treasured love might go from her, and leave her lonely. It was so sweet to hold him there, after those long weary years when she had yearned for the sight of his bonnie face and the sound of his strong, tender voice.

I always love those soft half-lights, the flickering ruddy glow a fire throws over the darkening stillness, or the mellow twilight's tender shade. We can think such fresh pure thoughts as the shadows creep slowly on, till the gradual darkness has no gloom, but seems rather as though it held a friend—loving, listening, and sympathising. We can build such bright “air castles” then—

castles that the glare of daylight would destroy, or the hush of night cast too much solemnity over. And if we are very young and *in love*, how sweet it is to sit alone in the twilight; what a bevy of tender whispering angels seem to crowd round, each burdened with some treasured thrilling word, or carrying a love-tinted portrait, changing and various, of that dear face that makes our kingdom! And, later on, in the cold grey twilight of our own lives, can we not sit by the ruddy fire, blow out the candle, *and forget?* Forget that we are old and time-lined; forget our feet, that have grown all too feeble for this busy world, are now on the threshold of life's mystery (its beginning or its end?); forget all these last dreary forty years, and go back again to the flower-laden garden of youth.

There is no light to glare cruelly on the

poor faded hair, even if we rise and go to the glass; the tender gloom will almost restore that beauty we loved passing well in the dear old wasted frivolous times; the fire will glow warm on the pale cheeks, will light up the dim eyes. Yes, smile; stand farther in the shade. Oh! gone youth, gone beauty, the soft unsteady firelight almost restores you! We can bring them back, too, those dear ones who made our morn so bright; they come, conjured up by this shadowed witching light; we can kiss their lips, ripe and red, not as we saw them last—icily, frigidly closed. We can take their hands, and hear them speak; hear too, in the far-off gloom, that rippling elfin laughter that once so warmed our hearts; and *she* comes nearer, her lips parted, her round cheeks dimpled; the flowers in her hair and on her breast have withered

now, for they were plucked forty years ago!

"What is the work you spoke of just now, Vivien?" said Lady Evelylin, breaking the silence.

The answer was so abrupt, cutting so sharply through the stillness that she started—

"I must find my father."

"Can't you let it rest, darling?" she said, gently. "It is so many years ago that he may be dead."

"He is not dead, Lady Evelylin; I am a fatalist on this one subject, and I know that we shall meet."

"If you meet him, Vivien, you will not forget that he is your father?"

"He has no claim on me," he said, quickly; "he is my mother's murderer, and I shall have no more mercy on him when

we meet than I should have on any other base wretch who merited my vengeance."

She looked up in the man's stern face, recoiling from the hatred that stamped out all softness from those deep dark eyes, and then she drew closer to him, winding her arm round his neck.

"Vivien," she said, "as a little child you never disobeyed me; will you obey me in one thing now? Will you pray to-night?"





CHAPTER XIV.



SIR HUGH BELLINGHAM'S shooting-box, far in the north of Scotland, was the envy of half his friends. Once there, closed in by rugged mountains, bounded by the deep still loch, with the grand eyesweep of wild unbuilt-on moors, life quickly merged into the sweet untrammelled sense of natural freedom that is the one happy attribute of savage lands.

From the time of his coming of age, some thirty years back, Sir Hugh had always mustered a goodly number of kindred spirits at his lodge by the 12th of August, and till the last three years it had

been exclusively a bachelor party. Three years back he had startled his friends by marrying a young girl in all the bloom of her first season. There has been much said about the disparity of January and May, the infinite want of sympathy there must be between tottering age and glad dawning youth—the one on the threshold of life, looking forward with eager, hopeful eyes to the long vista of untrodden pleasure, mistily uncertain, but all the more delicious for its tantalising anticipation; the other with the short, short future, bankrupt of hope and dulled with satiety, and the long dreary past with its few pleasant memories and many shortcomings; hardly fit companions on the road of life—the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

But all this is scarcely applicable to Sir Hugh and his wife, for it was in very truth love, and a girl's first love, that Nina

Devereaux gave to the man she married. She had been brought up in a greatly impoverished Cornish manor, the only sister of six brothers, their darling and their playmate—a noisy, warm-hearted, little, ebon-haired maiden. When she was sixteen, a rich widowed aunt, pitying her neglected niece, and foreseeing that the bonnie face would ripen into beauty in the world's trained school, sent for her, and after much devoted care from various prim governesses the wild bright flower gradually became more fit for the hot-house of fashion.

“You have no money, Nina, so of course you must marry well,” was her aunt's constant injunction; and before the year of her presentation was over Nina did marry, pleasing her aunt and herself by her choice; for Sir Hugh, besides being a remarkably handsome man, was also considered quite a

catch, though the grapes were somewhat sour from having tantalised those sly foxes the match-makers so long. "January and May" though in some respects they were, they made a handsome couple—the fine, aristocratic, *roué*-faced man, and the tall, bonnie, black-eyed girl, with her piquant *retroussé* features and ready hearty laugh. Never a *grande dame* would Nina become; she was always slightly unconventional; she could shoot with an unerring aim; she could hunt all day and dance all night, keeping the roses unfaded on her round cheeks; she would lay you any amount on the favourite, claiming her bets to the uttermost farthing; and, strange to say, her husband, who was a perfect slave to etiquette, seemed to admire his young wife all the more for her saucy defiance of "Mother Grundy."

Shall we look at her now, glowing with health—for Nina has been on the hills all day, and her bag was very full when the slaughter was done—as she stands in Julie's boudoir, in her gay tartan dress?

“Throw your book away, oh! my Julie,” she cries, laughing her own wide, dimpling, comely laugh; “for *He* has come!”

Miss Bellingham is lying, lazily graceful, on a low, roomy, old sofa. It is part of the woman to be graceful; taken in her most careless pose, the result would always be harmonious. She raises her long, half-veiled eyes just sufficiently to meet the other's.

“Your ladyship is quite enigmatical. Who is *He*?”

“The hero! the man of war! Captain Stanley! Now do dress quickly, you lazy child. I shall be quite nervous if I have to

receive him alone." She bends down, kissing Julie's fair face—"You will make haste, wont you?"

Lady Bellingham's one *bête noire* is the reception of strange guests ; she is so painfully conscious of her want of dignity on such occasions, and always tries to have Julie by her side—her cool, perfect non-chalance is such a shield.

Julie seldom spent so much thought on her toilet as on this warm August evening. She wishes to look her best in Captain Stanley's eyes ; she is almost cross with herself for the wish ; but, after all, life is very dull at the Lodge for this young lady, who has never fired a shot in her life, and who has been engaged for several long sober years to the only *young* man in the house ; and it is almost a duty to herself, she thinks, to accept the

good the gods have sent her, in the person of this much-talked-of soldier; and if a few arrows of coquetry fly straight to the mark, no one will be to blame, she thinks.

She is a born coquette, this soft, fair woman, false to her heart's core, winning love solely for the gratification of conquest, and, like many tyrants, only valuing it as long as it is withheld.

Julie has dismissed her maid, and is putting just the last finishing touches herself—those little artistic “prinkings” that no true woman ever thinks herself dressed without, and, trifling as they are in detail, it must be owned that the effect is sometimes marvellous—when Nina enters, her merry face slightly drawn into gravity at the thought of her new guest, and the dignity necessary to his reception.

“How lovely you look!” she cries, slightly

envious, knowing how the soft, insolent, perfect face stamps out all the beauty from her own bonnie, irregular features. "Shall I do?"

Julie knows that she is looking her best, and a strange, sweet smile parts the smooth red lips, as she contemplates herself for a moment in pleased scrutiny; then she turns slowly round—the light in her sleepy eyes is a new-made resolution.

"You look very well; but, my dear Nina, I don't see the beauty or the becomingness of your little festive adornment, unless you have deserved a crown; if so, laurels would be more suggestive."

The topaz flash has left her eyes, but the little musical laugh that ripples through those small white teeth is scarcely mirthful.

Nina Bellingham reddens as she glances at her smooth dark plaits, with deep-green

ivy leaves resting here and there in artistic disorder.

“Pauline wished so to put them in,” she says, apologetically; “but, as you say, they look rather strange! I shall wear a red rose instead—there are some beauties in the conservatory—only it will take so long to alter it.”

As Lady Bellingham goes back to have her hair redressed; Julie, laughing softly at her own craft, runs lightly down the creaking wooden staircase, and stands by one of the diamond-paned drawing-room windows.

It is an old place, this shooting-box; and Sir Hugh is rather proud of its antiquity, and allows no modern invention or improvement to lay its sacrilegious fingers on his tumbledown Lodge.

Julie’s hopes are crowned with success, for hardly has the gong sounded when

Vivien enters the room. She had thought he would be punctual—"Soldiers always are in strange houses," she had told herself; and the rule held good in this case.

"Miss Bellingham?" he bows, recognising her instinctively.

"Ah! you know me," she laughs. "I thought I had the advantage."

"How could I be mistaken?" And in the grave sweetness of his smile, she, woman-like, detects the "something wanting" in Vivien's life. "He is not happy," she mentally concludes. "I have heard so many descriptions of you."

"And," he adds to himself, "not one of them overdrawn."

"They must have been a little clearer than Olivia's, at least," she laughs. It is very provoking certainly that she, who is so used to open flattery, cannot help blushing

like a schoolgirl at the consciousness that he admires her, this man she had scarcely known for three minutes !

His face takes her wonderfully, with the quiet strength of brow and lip ; and as they talk, at rare intervals, she brings the quick light of laughter to those calm eyes. She is a clever physiognomist—many of those sly little coquettes are—and she sees that gloom is not natural to him, and again she recognises that he has suffered ; and looking at him, so comely a gentleman, there comes into her heart a vague pity—that dangerous pity that is so akin to love !

They are talking by the open casement, with all the freedom of old friends, when the others enter—the rich August sunset pouring its imperial splendour on her fair young face, framing it in, like a picture “beautiful exceedingly.”

But even in this early stage of their acquaintance, Vivien realises that the woman is a born actress; that every topaz glance from those long eyes, every short sweet laugh, is *trained*. He does not think it, he only feels it, but the feeling in no wise blunts her fascination.

Julie made a vow that night with brightening eye and smiling lip; it was a hazardous game she meant to play, but she looked forward to it none the less eagerly for that. If evil intent adds to crime, I wonder if premeditated coquetry is a sin?





CHAPTER XV.



OLONEL BELLINGHAM had been mightily astonished when he heard of Julie's engagement to D'Arcy Stafford, as indeed had been all her acquaintances. *Friends* she had none, in the true rendering of the word, for there were few men living who, having once looked on that soft bewitching face, had not felt something warmer than friendship; and as for women, Julie thoroughly disliked them one and all, not openly and actively, but in a soft, pleasant, *purring* way; but albeit the velvet paw hides well the talons, they are there, cruel and sharp, nevertheless. D'Arcy him-

self at first had viewed his great good fortune in the light of some fairy gift, that might at any moment vanish; but as the years passed on and the engagement was still only a name, no day being fixed for the wedding, was it wonderful that even his gentle, patient heart began to fret at the false position forced on him? It was worse than useless appealing to Julie; she had no wish to let her victim go, so at such times she bound him tighter in the trammels of her fascination; but she held out only little frail straws of hope, and he in his madness clung to them, loving and trusting her to the bitter end. But with his heart eating itself away it was hardly strange perhaps that the weak spirit should crave for some counter-excitement, and that craving was satisfied, amply satisfied, by the demon "Play." There in that pic-

turesque Lodge, in the mountain fastness, it held high carnival nightly, slowly draining the good, drop by drop, out of one weak gentle heart.

Vivien was pained to see the wreck D'Arcy had become; his face was so painfully pale and drawn, and there was a strange haggard look in his large blue eyes. When they first met he held his hand a long time, looking into the wasted young face.

"You never told me you had been ill," he said, reproachfully; "that of course accounts for your short notes of late."

D'Arcy reddened slightly.

"Do I look so bad as *that*, old boy? No, I have not been ill, not even a finger-ache."

"But you are ill now, D'Arcy."

"No indeed I am not," and he laughed uneasily, turning away from the kind

anxious face; "you could not look more serious if I was dying."

But his anxiety was not so easily allayed. One day, after noticing the lethargy, the dislike to conversation, and an almost *hunted* look that seemed to strengthen its hold on D'Arcy every day, he begged him most persistently to have medical advice; this he positively refused with more show of irritation than Vivien had ever seen in his manner before.

Vivien was never late in the smoking-room, so he did not know what high stakes changed hands in the small hours of the morning; for Sir Hugh was a real born gambler, and but for his general good-luck would soon have drained the ample patrimony he possessed. The Bellinghams one and all had always been fond of games of chance, and it was rumoured that not so

very far back in their pedigree a marriage with a rich mercer's daughter, neither young nor very fair, had only just saved the family credit. Be that as it may, not one inch of Abbey-Norton was mortgaged, nor had woodman's axe ever come nigh the centuries of timber that testified to their respectable antiquity. Yet had the tables been turned, and poverty instead of opulence been the man's portion, I verily believe there lives not a bigger blackleg in all Europe than Sir Hugh would have become—high play was life to him. Judging by the host, it was no wonder the guests, all but two exceptions, members of his own favourite club, carried gambling to the extreme pitch. Other hands might be steady on the hillside after sunrise, but assuredly those nights of excitement took more than their due out of D'Arcy.

About the pleasantest room in the Lodge was the library, a low-roofed, cool, snug nest, with just enough books to warrant its distinction, and just so many comfortable cosy "readable-in" chairs to make it at least an enviable retreat in a hot August noontide. Here, one wet afternoon, Vivien sat. He had just finished a somewhat lengthy epistle to Lady Evylin, and as he laid down his pen there was a strangely weary look on his face.

"I almost think I ought to ask her advice," he said out loud, and then he laughed gaily, chasing the shadows from his face as he walked to the window and looked out.

Truly it was no inviting prospect that his eye lighted upon. The darkening lonely moorland, the rugged mountains seeming to reach the black thunder-charged

clouds, and pouring downwards the slanting, steady lines of raindrops ; yet through the deluge came a station-fly, the poor horse drenched to the skin, tearing bravely onwards.

“Lady Bellingham will at last be satisfied,” Vivien thought ; for Nina had been grumbling a pleasant little growl all the morning about the cruel inclemency of the weather on this day of all others, when they were looking forward to the costurier’s arrival (for the lord of a neighbouring mansion had bidden them to a masquerade ball, and they were all anticipating much pleasure from this agreeable break to the monotony of the shooting season). That the fly contained that august functionary Vivien never doubted.

Captain Stanley was not feeling very satisfied with himself ; while writing to

Lady Evylin a new light had dawned upon him, and not a very pleasant one. He had been enjoying the shooting season thoroughly, with its bracing out-door sport and pleasant indoor sociability, the long homelike evenings, when most of the men had retired to the smoking-room, and those who remained had been a cosy party, with two fair women making melody for them; and now and then short sweet rambles in the gloaming, when they had generally got separated from the rest, and in some mysterious fashion he had found himself alone with Julie, learning how musical the low soft voice was, how bewilderingly witching the quick tawny flashing eyes, and how full of fascination the ready tact that served for wit with her, and crept into his intellect unawares, and into his strong loyal heart.

And as he wrote to Lady Evylin, suddenly there came a check to the pleasant epistolary chit-chat, hitherto so easy between those two. He felt a sudden shrinking from mentioning Julie's name. It had surprised him so, that, with the quick integrity that characterised him, he had straightway examined his heart; and viewing the past by this new light, it had dawned upon him suddenly, like one thoroughly awakened from an idle doze, how near he had grown to loving Julie Bellingham, with his eyes wide open to all her faults, knowing her a coquette, and a woman engaged to his oldest friend, the companion of his boyhood ! It was not an honest, open love that had been growing on him—not the love he could have offered to a true, pure-souled girl, but a mad intoxication founded on the witcheries she had practised; but we all

know that the spell of these unhallowed fascinations is often more potent than honest, open love. The laugh that followed his idea of asking the "little mother's" advice had almost driven away the grim truthsayer who had awakened his conscience; but nevertheless the beautiful mobile face danced often between him and the rain-dimmed window, and his heart grew strong in its promise of strength wherewith to conquer this infatuation. But there are loose joints in the armour of the most cautious of us, and the sly, small, unexpected arrows often do their work effectually.

"Ah! *Monsieur l'Ermite*, I've found you at last!" cried Nina, her merry face and dainty garments brightening the dark, sombre room like a sunbeam. "You have honestly won your bet, for Mr. Brinley is here!"

“I knew it. I saw him drive up.”

“And you stayed here as coolly as if nothing had happened! Why, I’ve been obliged to shut him up in the breakfast-room, and make Colonel Johnson mount guard, to prevent his being perfectly besieged.”

“I really am sorry to have given you the trouble of fetching me, but——” and Vivien reddened slightly, “I was thinking.”

“A regular fit of the blues, I am sure, mewed up in this ghostly room! But before I let you go I must have a promise that you will tell no one what you are going to wear; half the fun would be lost if we knew our own party even.”

It was a very amusing sight, that small crowd assembled outside the breakfast-room door. There was a great gravity on each

face, and a stranger would have thought some weighty State question was being settled, instead of the details of a fancy dress. Each was to go in separately, give his orders, and come out again, keeping his secret for a whole week !

Julie was standing by the passage window, looking out with a very grave face at the stormy landscape. Her cards had not turned out trumps as yet ; this, the first wet day, and the man she had meant to subjugate completely had not been near her the whole long, tedious afternoon. Most probably he had spent it pleasantly enough away from her, in the billiard-room ; for Vivien, though no gambler, would sometimes make a game for good-fellowship.

As he crossed the passage to her side, she looked up with all her old saucy defiance, and it told ill for the security of

the woman heart that she should feel obliged to hide her annoyance thus.

“Have you been studying your costume in solitude all the afternoon, Captain Stanley?” There was a suspicious sharpness in the clear voice that would have told many how hard it was to keep the gay tone; and of a truth Julie was feeling sadly weary, and had they been alone, and had she known that Vivien loved her, it would have been such a relief to creep into his strong arms, and nestle there, weeping away with this heartache while he gently soothed her.

“I was writing to Lady Evylin,” he said, coldly; for had he not made up his mind to tear this girl from his heart? And she, humbled in her love, loved him all the more for this cool carelessness; yet the wrathful blaze dried up all thought of tears in those deep brown eyes, and the

colour on her cheek deepened to a steady flush.

“What are you going to wear?” she said, carelessly.

“That is a great secret,” he laughed; “I promised Lady Bellingham not to tell any one.”

“Julie!” “Miss Bellingham!” “It is your turn!” “Will you go now?” cried half a dozen voices. And Julie quickly—as she had made up her mind before, on another occasion that you wot of—took her resolution now. Turning to Vivien, she said, in her usual low sweet voice, the voice I always mistrusted so, when the lambent light was in her eyes—

“Will you please take my place, Captain Stanley, I have not quite made up my mind yet?”

Julie took the next turn, and while the

costumier was showing her his fashion-plates, she so managed, talking and appealing to his taste the while, to just glance at the small MS. book wherein he entered their orders, and there she saw with a sudden thrill of pleasure—

“Captain Stanley, character—Othello.”

END OF VOL. II.



